

the village

# VOICE

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THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF NEW YORK

JUNE 25, 1979

60¢

## *iSiempre Salsa!*

By Pablo 'Yoruba' Guzmán (P. 92)

## Wimpy's Dilemma

*A Union Leader Moves Labor Left*

By Joe Conason

The most romanticized labor figures of the '70s have been either crooked teamsters or bigoted hardhats. In contrast, practically no organization has seemed as colorless as the real-life AFL-CIO, whose glory days ended decades ago. But now the crooks, creeps, and just plain tired are being elbowed aside by a bluntly unorthodox auto mechanic whose ironical nickname is Wimpy.

A glance at William W. Winpisinger would never reveal the gulf separating him from the rest of labor's hierarchy. Like a lot of other men his age, the 55-year-old president of the International Association of Machinists is beefy, balding, hard drinking, profane, and given to what he calls "a Buick dealer's" clothing style. But Wimpy is a socialist—as he explains, often patiently and sometimes belligerently, a "democratic socialist"—who looks like Middle America. He realizes his appearance is an advantage. (Cont. on p. 11)



PETER HUJAR

## VOICE ARTS

In/Con/Trans Fusion  
And Jazz/Rock/Funk  
Giddins and Christgau  
on Blood Ulmer (P. 54)

Breaking Down(Again)

Fremont-Smith on Didion's  
Steely Fragility (P. 102)

The Way We Were  
(More or Less)

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Hoberman on Les Blank's

Music and Food (P. 48)

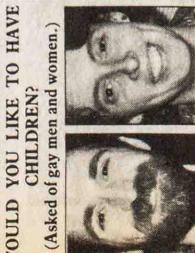
# GAY LIFE

## Ten Years After Stonewall

A Special 24-Page Section Featuring Arthur Bell, Blanche McCrary Boyd, Richard Brandys, Bertha Harris, Doug Ireland, Andrew Kopkind, Lita Lepie, Vito Russo, Steve Watson, and Edmund White, with Photographs by Peter Hujar (P. 61)

# VOICES

By Kate Wenner



WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE CHILDREN?  
(Asked of gay men and women.)



WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE CHILDREN?  
(Asked of gay men and women.)

I thought so, but I think I wouldn't be a good father. I'm a free person, and I don't think I could take the responsibility of someone who was that dependent on me. Being a father is a job, and you have to really love your children. For me, I think I want to give more of my love to myself. — Mario Favitoro, merchandising accountant, Chelse

No. I know some gay women who have had kids by artificial insemination, and I think it's a great idea but I'm not into kids. — Vittoria Repetto, massage therapist, Chinatown

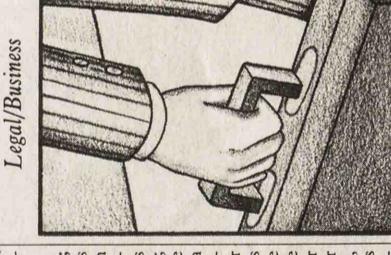
Absolutely. I'm an actor and I perform for children, and have a great love for them. But it's something I'm in conflict about right now. Wanting to have children has begun to make me reconsider my feelings about becoming gay. I always used to think that being gay eliminated the possibility of having children, but lately I'm beginning to see that it isn't necessarily so. — Alex Danylko, actor, West Village

I love children, and I think I have the capability to bring up a child, even though it's hard to do in a gay world. I have three brothers and they're accepting of my way of life, so I feel a child could be accepting too. I guess I'd do it with a bisexual man, but I'm going to be living with a woman. — Mildred P., unemployed, Bronx

No, I wasn't a successful child, and I don't know how to bring up successful children. By successful I mean happy. To me a child is a very difficult thing to deal with. You need talent to raise a child, and I don't feel like it's my talent. — Mary Anne Bollen, secretary, Soho

The simple goals of equality. Nowhere is this clearer than in the steady growth of a volunteer gay service network. The groups and agencies listed here are among 100 in New York that offer counsel, education, and support to gays—all gays, not just the handful the city admits it sees.

## Legal/Business



Between \$25-\$45 a session and work from their own offices. By appointment. 24-hour answering service.

**Hotlines**  
Gay and Young, c/o Gay and Lesbian Community Services, 110 East 23rd Street, Suite 502; 424-3020. When gays are in conflict about right now. Wanting to have children has begun to make me reconsider my feelings about becoming gay. I always used to think that being gay eliminated the possibility of having children, but lately I'm beginning to see that it isn't necessarily so. — Alex Danylko, actor, West Village

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**Parents**  
Lesbian Mothers Custody Center, 110 East 23rd Street, Suite 502; 677-8358. Formerly Dykes and Ties. Peer counseling and legal resources for lesbian mothers. Monday to Thursday, 6 to 9 p.m.; daytime, call Women's Center, 780-5777

**Counseling**  
Homosexual Community Counseling Center, 301 East 60th Street; 688-0628. HCC is the city's oldest gay counseling center. Established in 1971, it is essentially a referral service. After a \$20 initial screening session, applicants are farmed out to one of the center's 30 affiliate psychologists. Critics charge that HCC is less interested in counseling than in building up the practices of these affiliates (some gay, some not), who charge be-

most questions handled by phone. Most questions handled by phone. Monday through Thursday, 7:30 to 10 p.m., free.

**Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee**, 675 Hudson; 242-1212. This committee, representing 50 organizations, is charged with the responsibility of organizing the gay community's most awesome media event: Sunday's gay pride march. But as of last week, the 10 overworked members of the committee were still readying press kits and deciding where to distribute event calendars. The committee operates year-round, raising funds with bar benefits and by selling buttons in Sheridan Square.

**National Gay Task Force**, 80 Fifth Avenue, Rm 1601; 741-5800. With about 8000 members, NGTF is the largest gay political organization in the country. It concentrates primarily on gay image and rights, to the tune of whistle-while-you-work-within-the-system. Unlike many other groups listed here NGTF is not a service organization. Office open to the public 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays. Annual member \$100, includes subscription to monthly newsletter.

**Greater Gotham Business Council**, P.O. Box 751, Chelsea Station, 10011; 242-3900. This alliance of gay businesspersons seeks to show the positive strength of gay dollar power. GBBC sponsors seminars on professional development and calls on gay entrepreneurs to speak at monthly meetings. It has also compiled a referral directory of member businesses and services, ranging from artists and accountants to insurance agents. As a resource to the gay community, it provides prospective small businesses instruction on accounting and bookkeeping, tax shelters and investments, and counsels individuals on planning wills, joint property purchase, and partner contracts in the event of death or split. A gay credit union is currently being planned with the council actively seeking economic statistics on gays for review by the City Council.

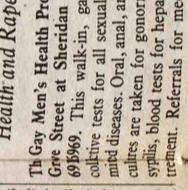
**Ninth Street Center and East Village Counseling Service**, 319 East Ninth Street; 228-5153. For gays who feel temporarily overwhelmed by a lover, job, or sexuality. Minimum contribution, \$5. Mondays through Wednesdays, 7 to 10 p.m. Open talk groups Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday at 8 p.m.; lesbian rap group every Sunday. Call for times and details.

**Gay Switchboard**, 741-2610. Accepts calls from women only. One line, and that often tied up with rap calls. But when you get through, Confide, 127 East 69th Street, 861-1225; Box 56, Tappan, New York 10983; 914-359-8860. Assisted by another counselor and a top-flight advisory board, founder lay-counselor Garret Oppenheim concentrates on practical, pre-op goals for transsexuals. The only center of its kind, Confide has helped 300 people, and also puts out *Transitions* magazine whenever it can.

**Gay and Lesbian Community Services**, 110 East 23rd Street, Suite 502; 533-2019. Offers employment counseling. Monday and Tuesday after 7 p.m. Crisis intervention therapy referral on Wednesday nights, and a lesbian clinic which packs 'em in every Thursday night. Donation requested. — Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., 22 East 40th Street; 532-8197. These lawyers have been litigating impact cases since 1973, when they sued the Secretary of State for denying them nonprof incorporation. After this initial victory (the judge found their a "charitable and benevolent purpose"), Lambda proceeded to litigate the Matlovitch and Berg cases, and is currently on cases involving the New York State sodomy law, students and teachers and federal prisons that ban gay publications.

**Lesbian Feminist Liberation Center**, 243 West 20th Street; 691-5460. The center and clearinghouse for feminist leading lesbian-rights group sponsors. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**Lesbian Feminist Archives**, P.O. Box 1258, 10001; 874-7232. Probably the most thoroughly documented lesbian archive of lesbians in the world. Five women save, restore, and catalog every pertinent book, pamphlet, journal, tape, videotape, record, and photo. They also issue a newsletter.



**Health and Rape**  
The Gay Men's Health Project, 74 Greene Street at Sheridan Square; 918-989. This walk-in, gay men's collective tests for all sexually transmitted diseases. Oral, anal, and penile syphilis, blood tests for hepatitis. No treatment. Referrals for medication.

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While it works within the system, the condition is fond of splashy events, and organizes protests, demonstrations, cities a "Bigot of the Month," and is considering boycotts. But the clinic's epidemiological staff, source, supplying grassroots gay community groups with organizational information quickly proves. The place is dingy, the wait interminable, as 200 patients a day, is ace. Some startling facts from Terry Novak of the clinic's epidemic staff: August and September are peak months for gonorrhea and syphilis incidence. Syphilis frequently results from repeated contacts with an infected partner. As much as 30 per cent of venereal cases are asymptomatic—you can have it and never know. Novak advises his sexually active to get tested as often as once a month. Monday and Thursday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., results within a week, free, confidential.

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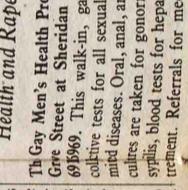
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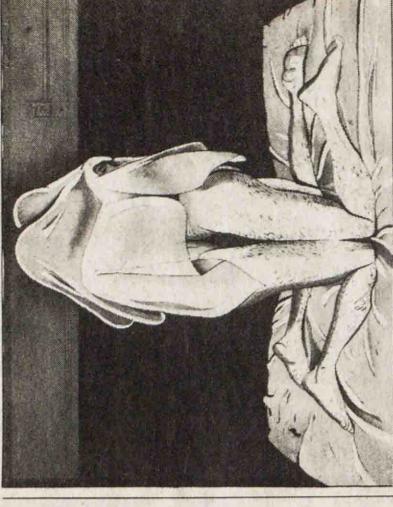
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## Law

### Is Coming Out a Political Act?

If the prospect of securing gay rights in the courts looked dim these past years, there was ample reason. When the Supreme Court upheld a Virginia anti-sodomy statute in the 1976 case of *Doe v. Attorney for the City of Richmond*, it slammed the door on the rights of consenting adults to do as they pleased. The Virginia decision, which forbade straight couples straying too far from the missionary position, went out of its way to insure that homosexuals fell squarely under the ban.

Early this month the California Supreme Court breathed new life into efforts to secure constitutional recognition of gay rights. The California case, *Gay Law Students Association v. Pacific Telephone and Telegraph*, was filed on behalf of a job applicant and a former employee of PT&T. One had been rejected and the other dismissed by the state-run utility—one of California's largest employers—because they were openly gay. PT&T has a formal policy barring employment of homosexuals.

With the assistance of the Gay Rights Advocates, the students' association charged the utility with violating the equal-protection clauses in both the federal and California constitutions and the state labor code barring discrimination because of political activity. Breaking with custom, the plaintiffs sidestepped right-to-pify arguments and based their challenge on the premise that "coming out" is a political act. The original trial court dismissed the case without hearing evidence, but the argument caught the attention of the state supreme court, which, in a stunning reversal, remanded the case for trial.

Since the facts were never at question (PT&T readily admitted to the firing and job refusal on the ground of the applicant's sexuality), the court's recognition of "coming out" as politics radically altered the strategies of the gay legal struggle. "This decision," says Matthew Coles, lawyer for the Gay Rights Advocates, "is the first case to hold that gays have rights under the equal-protection clause of the Constitution."

Chances of gays achieving "suspect" status in the constitutional sense were never good since the court was loathe to give leverage to a group that many on the bench felt deserved discrimination. Now all that has changed.

Richard Parker, professor of constitutional law at Harvard, hails the equal protection clause as "the best chance ever for constitutional rights for gays." Still Parker cautions against premature optimism. "I wouldn't press this at the Supreme Court just now," he says, alluding to the purportedly homophobic Rehnquist. "Justice Rehnquist cites *Do* as though it were a full-scale Supreme Court decision, which it's not. That indicates there isn't much court interest in the issue—to say nothing of sympathy toward homosexuals."

Gays are still a long way from real constitutional sanction, but the equal-protection clause historically has proven a flexible instrument for recognizing rights. At that time, the practice was legal at Fire Island's Kismet and Dunewood beaches. Not any more. The Islip town board last week 5 to 0 to ban nude bathing there. Violators are now liable to a maximum penalty of 15 days in jail and a \$200 fine.

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**Womankind Books**, 201 West 92nd Street; 873-4121. Three women founded this univocal (over 5000 titles listed) source store in 1975. Hard-line feminism is tempered with humor. They will stock *The Total Woman*. Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday noon to 6 p.m.

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Syphilis frequently results from repeated contacts with an infected partner. As much as 30 per cent of venereal cases are asymptomatic—you can have it and never know. Novak advises his sexually active to get tested as often as once a month. Monday and Thursday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., results within a week, free, confidential.

**Bookstores**  
New York City Police Department Sex Crime Analysis Unit, 1 Police Plaza, Room 1312; 233-3000. Since New York Women Against Rape has lost funding as well as its space, the NYCDA's enlightened unit is the best source for rape victims. Seven women officers field calls, give aid, and psychological referrals. Oddly, male rape is impossible under law that defines the crime as "carnal knowledge of a female by the use of force against her will." Anal and oral sex under duress are defined as sodomy, punishable by up to 25 years in jail.

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**Gay Women's Alternative**, 4 West 76th Street; 532-8669. Meets Thursday evenings at 8 p.m. for "Nuclear and Other Atrocities."

**Religion**  
Dignity/NY, Box 1554, 10022; 869-3050. City's largest Catholic gay organization. Home masses Saturdays and Sundays.

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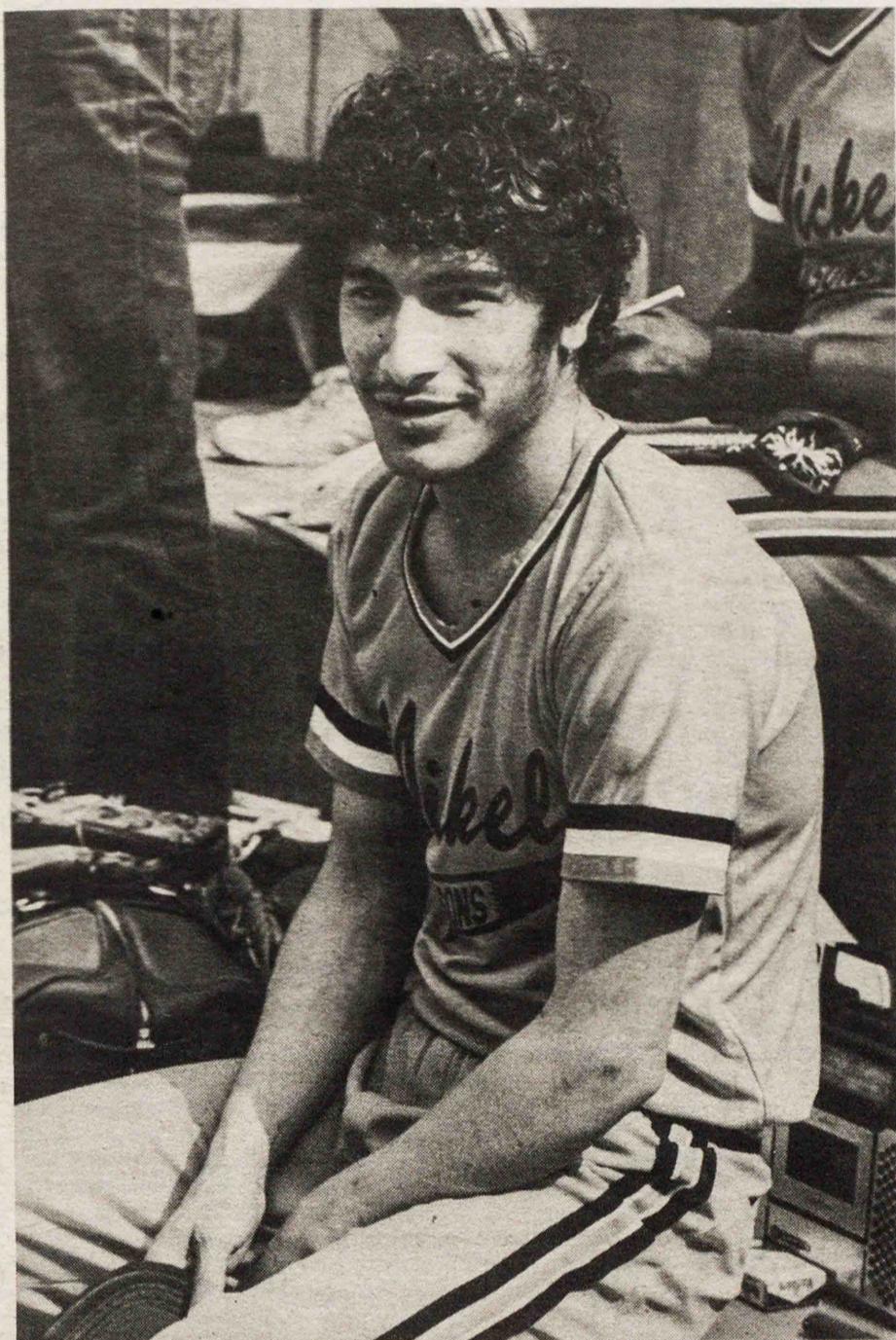
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# GAY LIFE



Dondi Puccio, third baseman of the Nickels Bisons



Poet and singer Iolsta Hatt

## Present at the Creation

By Andrew Kopkind

The lives of great cities are ordinarily organized by the imperatives of class, race, religion, and authority. The temper of Boston is Brahmin and Celtic; the tone of Dallas is Baptist and *nouveau riche*; the mood of Chicago is bourgeois and bossy. The texture of New York is woven of all cults, castes, and nationalities, but now there is another, wholly new strand in the social fabric: affection. For the first time in history an affectional community — comprising a million or more homosexuals — occupies a territorial base, and it has begun to promote its power and assert its attitudes in ways that are rarely recognized and little understood.

New York has become a gay place. The material of the new homosexual culture pervades its life, from lowbrow to highbrow, on the streets and in the shops, the theatre, the cafes, and the apartments of at least a dozen neighborhoods. What is startling about this cultural explosion (the city has seen many others) is that it flows from a source of sexual identity, just as the stuff of ethnic and religious com-

munities grew from their more familiar roots. We know about Polish peasants, African slaves, Prussian burghers, Cantonese coolies, Latins, Litvaks, and Levantines. We can trace their influence in our politics, our literature, music, business, language, dress, cuisine, morality, and everyday attitudes. We speak of the Jewish novel, black jazz, Calvinist work ethic, Latin rhythm, Oriental patience, Irish politics, Italian filmmaking. We may relish, detest, or simply describe the regional flavors that blend in the melting pot, but their origins are hardly mysterious anymore.

But there are no evident precedents (in this civilization, at least) for the development of an "ethnic" culture based on sexuality and centered in a single geographical district. Scholars may fetch far for parallels in the myths of Amazon woman-nations or the tales of Greek homoerotic cults; but there are no ready records of self-conscious communities formed around a shared, exclusive sexual trait — masculinity, femininity, homosex-

uality, transvestitism, or whatever — to compare with the extensive gay society that has developed in the American metropolis in the few short years since its birth in 1969 in Sheridan Square, in the battle of the Stonewall bar. It is no exaggeration to say that we are present at the creation of a stage of society and a style of life that is unique in the world we inhabit.

Two important distinctions should be set down. First, the new gay city includes both men and women, of course, but for many reasons (not least of which is plain sexism) the gay male elements are more noticeable than the lesbian ones; and many of the descriptions used to characterize the common culture come out of the male experience. Patterns of lesbian culture are often included in the larger category of feminism — for which there is no gay male analogue. Second, the development of a visible gay community in New York — in Manhattan, most of all — is replicated by similar developments in other cities around the country. The

birth of the various gay communities is really a vast "invasion," a migration that is both external (from the hinterlands to regional centers and then to the largest cities) and internal (from the closets into the sunlight and moonglow). Gay life elsewhere may be more intense or perfected; but nowhere is it as much of a model, on a scale so mass, as in Manhattan.

The elements of gay style are both banal and extraordinary, as unimportant as the short cut of men's hair and as weighty as the invention of pop art, as trendy as the redevelopment of Columbus Avenue and as serious as the emergence of gay psychiatric and medical services. Gay sensibility can be sordid — the dives

**thevillage VOICE**

**A Special Section**

*Photographs by Peter Hujar*

*Edited by Arthur Bell, Richard Goldstein, and Susan Lyne; copy-edited by Ronald Plotkin; researched by Jeff Weinstein; and designed by George Delmerico.*

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## GALLERIES

### NAKED MEN

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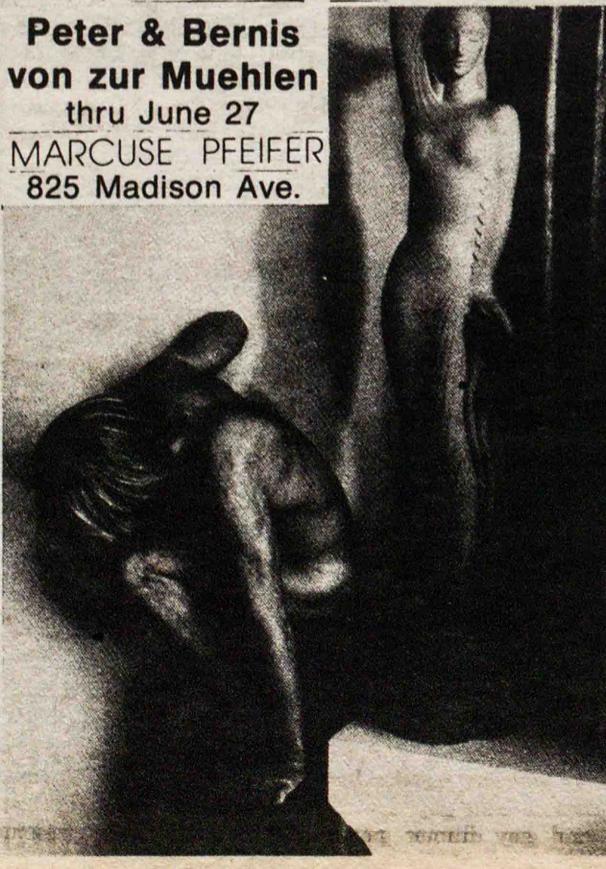
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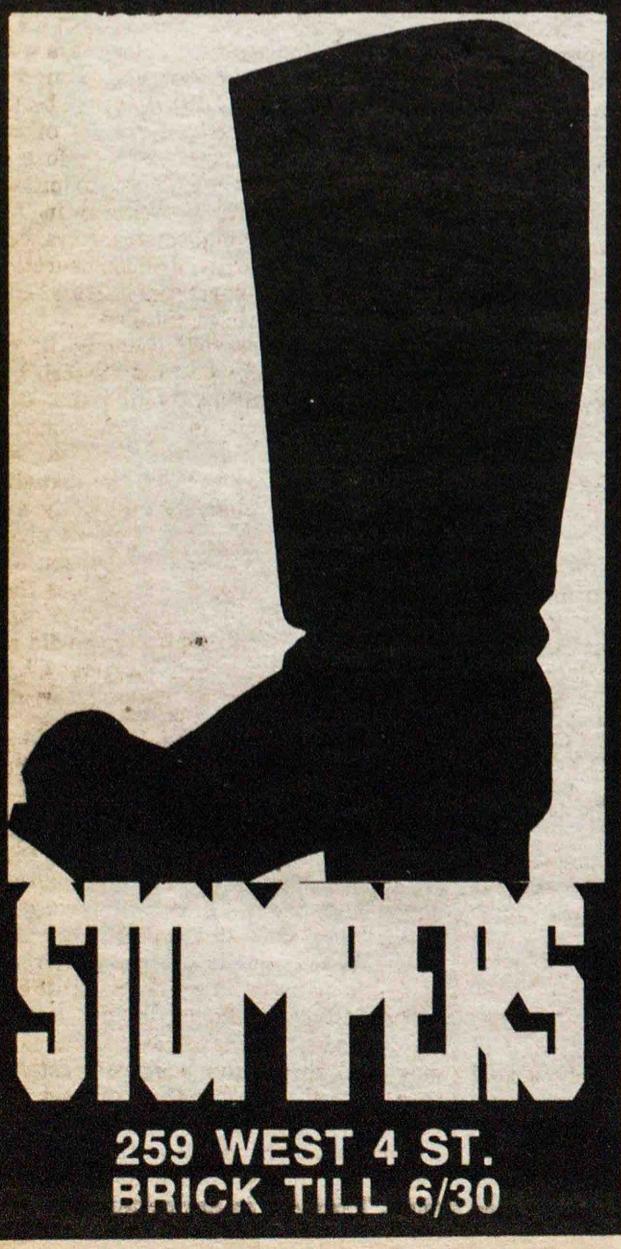
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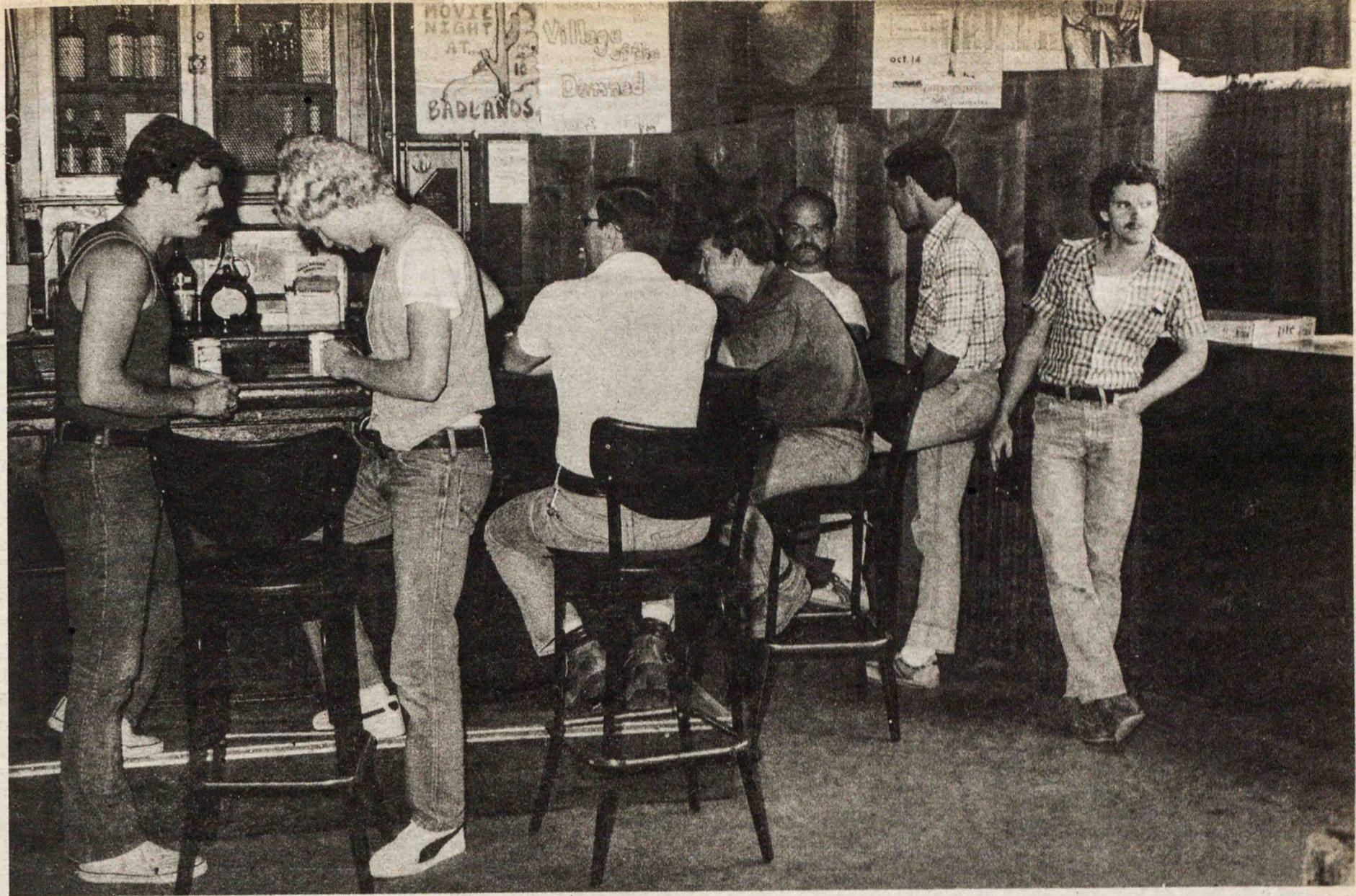
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All told, there are as many separate—and often contradictory—styles as there are homosexuals, and the assertion of any one of them, or of any set or system, may provoke vehement attacks and vigorous exceptions from those who do not feel themselves included. No heterosexual is as bothered by the bars and baths as are gays who do not frequent them; no Brooks-Brothered straight man will rail against the leather look as furiously as a preppy partisan of Shetland sweaters and penny-loafers in an East Side gay garden; no one hates gay disco more than a gay punk.

For like the other evolving, expanding ethnic sectors in New York—black and Latin, for instance—the gay community is fragmented, disparate, and heterogeneous while it is profoundly self-conscious. Differences in class, gender, age, race, ideology, and psychology give the culture its many-sided surface: it can be as radical, reactionary, racist, tolerant, snobbish, or democratic as any other social grouping in these times. But what unites homosexuals on a deeper level are the common condition of oppression, the shared history of liberation, and the sense of permanent separation from the prevailing social definition of normality. We may be teased, tolerated, or loved; we must always be different. From such differences comes a unity in spite of ourselves, a sense of pride as well as fear, struggle as well as acceptance, superiority as well as vulnerability.

Straight society sees homosexuals (the flamboyant few), but it does not readily recognize the presence of a gay culture. Last winter, the *New York Times Magazine* published a cover story on the city's “renaissance,” replete with color photographs of all the fashionable features of born-again Gotham: discos, musical comedies, Bloomingdale's, rehabbed

brownstones, warehouse neighborhoods, Deco restaurants, designer boutiques, gourmet kitchens. There was hardly an item on the list that was not tinged with gay sensibility—or created by it. And yet the influence of the new sexual community on the revitalized city was never once mentioned—not even in the coy euphemisms (“neighborhoods of single adults”) that the genteel press prefers. Gays who read the *Times* were astounded by the omission. It was as if a newspaper had described the New South without mentioning the blacks of Atlanta or Birmingham, or had recalled pre-war Vienna without admitting the existence of its Jews. The oppression of gays takes many forms—from brutal discrimination in employment to psychological submission in the family—but the most devastating of all is the cloak of invisibility imposed by the straight powers that be.

It is hardly surprising that gays themselves often participate in the unorganized conspiracy of silence about the very existence of gay culture. Gays are all still in the closet to some degree, the militant no less than the mouse. Invisibility may be frustrating and stifling, but it is also protective. Homosexuals who are entirely comfortable in an all-gay environment often find it difficult or disturbing to communicate the quality of that experience to their straight friends, no matter how approving the straights may be: “they don't understand”; “they have no idea what goes on in our lives”; “they don't think like us.” Every gay person knows that the mood of a roomful of homosexuals is abruptly and irreversibly changed when straights enter.

The straight world is what is; to be gay is to be aware of a special reality. Depending on how a particular homosexual may feel about himself or herself at a given moment, that reality may be glorious or ghastly, enlivening or deadening. But gay reality stands out against ordinary life in sharp relief. There are neighborhoods and gay neighborhoods, newspapers and gay newspapers, resorts and gay resorts, bars and gay bars, doctors and gay doctors, dinner parties and gay dinner parties

(compare: judges and lady judges, or theatre and black theatre). The very awareness of a distinction constitutes the primary closet, whether gays are conversationally open about their sexuality or not. For liberation, after all, is both a personal and a social process. Heterosexual consciousness imposed closets on gays in the first instance, through religion, the ideology of family life, machismo, puritanism and gentility. Gays cannot fully escape without changing the greater world as well as their own smaller selves.

From the moment gays begin to test their identities against straight “norms,” they learn to pretend: to hide behind straight masks, to perform straight parts in straight plays, to divide gay selves from straight roles. Only the eyes betray the truth: gay men check out everyone within eyeshot for the sly glance, the subtle mannerism, the hidden smile, the measured gait, the clothes, the posture—all to find fellow members of the tribe and announce their own “ethnicity,” in ways so covert that outsiders (those whom other tribes may call strangers, barbarians, *oafs* or *goyim*) seldom catch the exchanges. It happens all the time: on the subway, in an office, on a movie line, in all-night banking centers, airport lounges. The universal gay check-out glance may be a kind of “cruising,” but its basis is survival and support more often than sex. Until recently, a gay grew up believing he was the only queer in the world; the search for others is essentially a means of reassuring himself that he will never again be alone.

There were millions of homosexuals before Stonewall, of course, but there was no coherent, self-aware gay community. There were bohemian elites and quiet cliques of closeted homosexuals, but no gay culture, no visible gay presence on the street except for the odd “queen.” For the most part, homosexuals were allowed to express their identity in purely sexual terms (hence the clinical, Latinate name *homosexual*), and only after dark, in bars and in bed. Homosexuals had straight jobs, socialized with straight friends within a strictly heterosexual culture, par-

ticipated in straight politics, talked straight talk. Homosexuals bought records of straight popular music, whose lyrics told of guys and their dolls. The straight theatre consisted of plays based on the formula: boy meets girl, etc.

Only after the straights dropped off of fatigue or boredom could homosexuals “go out”—that is, present themselves in a gay setting. But the night trips of that era were always furtive, dangerous and often humiliating. What gay culture existed before 1970 was preeminently a culture of oppression, in which homosexuals conformed to the perverse and prejudiced definitions of sexual “deviation” dreamed in the worst heterosexual nightmares. Gays were sissies, tramps, sadists, drunks, neurotics, hysterics. All expectations were confirmed, all prophecies fulfilled.

The few homosexuals honored in the heterosexual world were forgiven their bad habits if they did not flaunt them, or if they made a valuable contribution to straight culture. Tennessee Williams was lionized as long as he kept the sexuality of his dramatic characters properly ambiguous and his own predilections nicely sublimated. What Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears did after the opera was their own business. Similar rules held in other oppressed cultures: Ralph Bunche did not flaunt his blackness and Margaret Chase Smith did not trumpet feminism; the occasional homosexual celebrity was expected to keep his or her own quirk hidden as well.

Looking back, the world seemed positively medieval; in these post-liberation years, gays have been able to integrate their lives with the facts of their sexual identity to a degree considered impossible a short time ago. In New York now, gays may live in supportive surroundings, in heavily gay districts, within a social and economic infrastructure shot through with aspects of gay culture. Gays may work in gay-run businesses catering to a gay clientele, or they can get jobs through the gay network in larger establishments, such as department stores, where gays occupy top managerial positions. They eat in gay restaurants, shop

on gay avenues in gay boutiques, listen to gay-oriented music, share gay living quarters, dance in gay discos, vacation in gay garden spots, worship in gay churches, read gay magazines and gay novels, snack on gay pizza and gay burgers, see television programs with gay characters and movies by gay directors featuring gay actors and actresses, play softball in gay leagues and hope for victory in the Gay World Series, sail on gay cruises, get high on gay drugs pushed by gay dealers, and spend all their social hours with gay friends.

Both straights and gays debate the value of gay exclusivity, but the trend appears to be firmly established. The need for it is evident beyond argument: gay culture strengthens the fragile self-image of homosexuals, and the more complete the community, the stronger the image. The development of a more or less total gay culture is analogous to the experience of other ethnic minorities at similar moments in the history of their liberation movements: read Miami Beach for Fire Island or 125th Street for Christopher Street, and gay exclusivity does not seem so strange. Many homosexuals will continue to spend their hours in heterosexual culture, too; there is no one empowered to demand affiliation in one or another social set. But the developing gay community in New York will certainly set the terms for the next phases in all of gay life: there is power, energy, and innovation in the creation of a separate gay society, and it has already had an enormous impact on the lives of all New Yorkers.

What makes a hamburger gay? Certainly it is not a genital attribute. What counts is the context: like the space "around the fish" in Klee's famous painting, the surroundings of the ordinary burger on the bun give it a cultural meaning. Walk into Pershing's on Columbus Avenue or Clyde's on Bleecker Street: the sound is disco, the texture is grainy, the pitch is high. A youngish man with a dark mustache, short dark hair, and a tight T-shirt and jeans approaches with a

certain smile. He nods in a familiar manner and recites the list of burger possibilities (cheddar, "blue cheese," bacon) in a litany laced with a little lilt. Almost everyone in the room seems to be a male homosexual. Even the plants are well hung; and so a neuter burger becomes recognizably gay.

Sometimes the defining characteristic of the new gay institution is the specific makeup of its clientele: the sheer size and aggressive good taste of Bloomingdale's gay trade makes the store a center of the New York gay marketplace. Often, gayness is a matter of attitude or emotion: gay disco music is apt to be rhapsodic or sentimental rather than driving and raw—Candi Staton rather than Instant Funk. Or, that certain veneer of camp irony may characterize a gay neighborhood: Columbus Avenue—the main street of the "Swish Alps"—is lined by shops with such names as The Sensuous Bean (coffee), Kiss and Make Up (cosmetics), Le Yogurt (yogurt), the Cultured Seed (flowers). Decoration of course, is also telling: the To Boot cowboy boot store on West 72nd Street—"Queens Boulevard"—features "situation windows" that suggest the presence of odd couples rather than the conventional kind. In one display, two pairs of empty boots are placed in a room from which the occupants have hastily abandoned an elaborate Sunday brunch. One can only imagine what is happening "offstage."

Bars are still at the core of gay social life (there are more than 70 in Manhattan), and the baths, backrooms, and warehouse barracks where sex is easily and anonymously available remain popular from that earlier era when they were, in a sense, pressed on the gay population by the straight definition of homosexual encounters as strictly zip-fuck meetings. While many gays deplore the exploitation of affection which bar life entails, the priapal palaces still serve a social and emotional purpose that will last until the next level of ascent to a more sincere and non-sexist society is reached. But while

gays attack "cock culture" from the inside, there is something disingenuous about straight criticism of gay social institutions from the outside—as if masters condemned servants for participating in the culture of servitude.

The specific vision, manners, protocols, and imagination of gay culture were first forged in response to the prevailing definition of homosexuals as "different" in their sexual affections from ordinary people. Those who are called different and treated as such, will naturally develop different ways of life. At bottom, it matters little what the original difference was thought to be: Jewish culture began many millennia ago as a function of the oppression of Jews for their monotheism or their curious tribal rituals. But theology is not primarily what concerns that culture today. Blacks were oppressed because of the amount of melanin in their skin and because of their African habits of life; but black culture in America is more than a color code or a continental curiosity.

And yet many heterosexuals still admit the existence of only sexual differences between themselves and homosexuals. Jeff Greenfield, for instance, charged in this paper last year that gay rights are unworthy of liberal support because they involve mere methods of copulation, not community demands or cultural needs. For such heterosexual critics (and there are homosexuals still stuck in their closets who want desperately to agree) there is no gay culture, no gay lifestyle, no gay consciousness—just isolated units of homosexuals doing their thing in the sack.

Such denials of a gay sensibility lead to bizarre lapses of comprehension. For example, *Time* and *Newsweek* have both published long cover articles on the masters of pop art, which detail every conceivable influence brought to bear on the works of these artists—except the overwhelming fact of the homosexual culture to which they belong. Reading such analyses, we learn about the importance of the artist's regional background, his relationship to city and country, his favorite

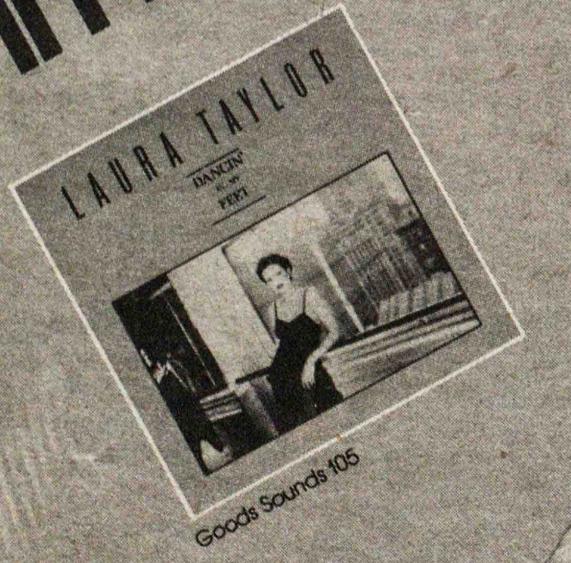
ancestors in art history—about everything except the one influence which was most responsible for the creation of the artistic genre: the gay aesthetic vision. The pop artists and their followers attacked the analytic traditions of modernism that held sway for 50 years, and promoted instead a romantic "camp" attitude that profoundly changed American tastes in art, performance, and design. It is impossible to understand these breaks in cultural continuity without accepting the reality of a gay aesthetic—and yet it seldom appears in straight art criticism. Only when artists paint homosexual pornography, or when writers describe sexual acts, is their own sexual "preference" considered relevant.

The struggle for visibility—that is, for social acceptance of a gay identity beyond mere sexual practice—is long and tedious, with lags and leaps at unexpected times and in improbable places. Failures in the political forum—such as the repeated refusal by the City Council to pass an anti-discrimination ordinance—may turn out to be less significant than success in community development. For the most important changes in the lives of gay people since Stonewall have come from the creation of the new ecology of gay institutions—commercial, cultural, political, and intellectual—which provide the material basis to protect and extend the community.

The gay "movement" after Stonewall was largely radical in its analysis of sexist society and militant in its practice of confrontation with the straight male "ruling class." It had personal and ideological ties to the equally radical and militant antiwar, civil rights, and socialist movements of the era. There was a moderate wing as well, but it too was part of a movement of structured organizations—even if the total effort often seemed disorganized and the relationships were usually strained.

Only in the loosest sense does a definable gay political movement still exist in New York: rather, there is a social earthquake, without significant, repre-

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sentative organization or clear direction. If there is a discernible theme to this enormous event it is, simply, change: very little that can be seen in metropolitan gay culture today will last the year, perhaps not even the week.

For example, the macho styles of dress and attitude so much in vogue in Village gay life in recent times seem to have lost their power and punch. While the "look" is still prevalent, it is no longer on the front edge of historical necessity. Gay macho (which was really never macho at all, if the truth is told: under those leather

jackets lurked a lot of pussycats) expressed and exaggerated the suppressed masculinity of gay men, now made legitimate by the ideology of liberation. In the old days, homosexuals were "nellies" and "femmes." Suddenly, it was possible for homosexual men to be *men*, and they clutched at society's symbols to validate that difficult definition. Some gays with a well-developed radical approach were able to avoid the butch look and the violent symbols. But macho had to work itself out. As macho naturally followed sissy, its own negation will arrive when the

time is ripe—probably soon, from the look of things.

One clue to the new shape of things could be found at the annual Black party held last month at the Flamingo disco, attended by several thousand of the most self-conscious gay circuit riders in the city. The 1978 Black Party had crackled with leather and rattled with chains; its dominant style was s&m. This year, the hard core softened: costumes were fanciful and ethereal rather than heavy-metal—headresses of silver-tipped black feathers replaced executioners' hoods of leather.

Moreover, the mood of the party shifted from sinister to rollicking, from heavy duty to good fun.

Flamingo is an extreme example in all respects—many gays find it intimidating because of the emphasis its members place on brawn and bodies and disco madness. But the same kinds of changes evident at the Black Party there will be found in other gathering places which cater to gays of milder temperaments.

If one factor in the change of attitude is the passage of time, another is the arrival of the second post-liberation generation to positions of status in the gay community. Homosexuals who came out—that is, affirmed their sexual identity to themselves and those around them—when they were already adults will never lose their closet consciousness as thoroughly as young gays who come out now, in a vastly changed social universe, during adolescence or before. The latecomers see the issues in their own way, conditioned by the pain and confusion of years of real repression. The task of self-definition as gays was arduous and confused; the ways were uncharted.

Younger gays today are relieved of some (although not all) of the problems which plagued the first generation. While there is more open "fag-baiting" and less genteel obliviousness found in many areas of the city, the psychological security of a vast, visible gay world is drawing out people who would have been intractably closeted in the '60s. At least there are available models now by which young gays can begin to define themselves. And those who will come out in future years into a much more supportive and well-posted gay community will have a still clearer sense of who they are. How that will affect their behavior in the full society is impossible to predict with any certainty. But it is clear that homosexual life 10 years from now will present scenes as different from those visible today as our own pictures are rearranged from the pre-Stonewall era.

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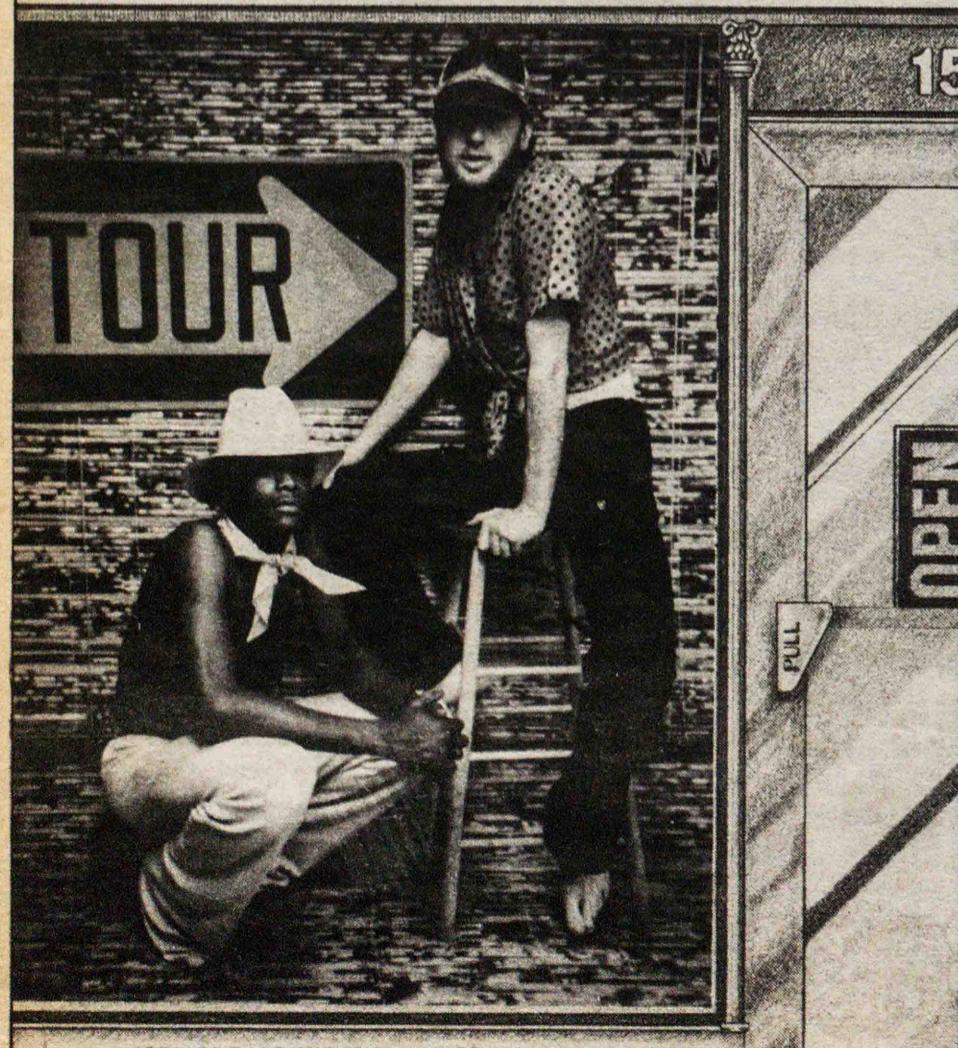
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men in New York these days that one writer I know describes as the "killer fruits." They are rich, powerful, and manipulative businessmen, lawyers and designers who hold court in East Side duplexes, chic discos, and the Hamptons with a retinue of young "twinkies"—attractive boys who are kept amused, kept busy, and simply kept by their older protectors. Competition among the "killers" is fierce, pressures are intense, and humane values are held in abeyance as the men jockey for position, status, and the favors of their followers. The "killers" are only partly out of their closets; they gain power by keeping their sexual identity ambiguous to the straight world in which they operate. But they are of a certain age and history which suggest that they will soon vanish as a breed. The closet that produces them will cease to be so attractive as the gay community widens and its opportunities for a fulfilling life improve. Closets are places of personal as well as social oppression: they torment their inhabitants and diminish their functional capabilities. The end of the closet—as a concept of mind—is the essential goal of gay liberation.

Because there is no politburo, legislature, or gay town meeting to establish priorities and set goals for the gay community, the scene in New York is every-homosexual-for-himself. Contradictions tumble over one another: for instance, every phase of liberation becomes a base for commercialization—which in a certain sense replaces one form of oppression with another. The demands of vanguard capitalism on the consciousness of the gay community are in some ways as strong as the strictures of puritanical heterosexuality. Gays have more disposable income these days than their straight counterparts in class and age—there are few, if any, children to educate, families to support, heirs to provide for. Gays may be easily led into traps of conspicuous consumption.

There is a final contradiction in the construction of a complete gay society, which may prove to be the most difficult to resolve: the backlash of heterosexuals against the accumulation of power, privilege, and status by gays. The difficulties here will not arise primarily from the Anita Bryant end of the right wing, nor from the traditional homophobic centers in orthodox religion. The more serious problem will come from the majority of straight men who find their own emotional mobility and social comfort circumscribed by the growing influence of gays—in business, entertainment, and everyday life. Heterosexual men used to take their privileged positions for granted, but all at once it seems, they are threatened by the success of gay liberation and feminism. It is not impossible to conceive a scenario for severe backlash. In a time of economic hardship, straight men may come to believe that gays have the good jobs, the most spending money, the least responsibilities—and the most fun. Gays could be seen not only as "different," but also as threatening. At that point, the gay "ethnic" community could be a target as easily as other groups served as scapegoats for mass social failure in the past.

Gays will be vulnerable for years to come—as far into the future as we can see. But gay liberation and feminism are allied in function as well as form, and together they infiltrate so much of the majority society that it would be hard to re-isolate and destroy them. The gay ghetto is primarily a function of consciousness, not class or race. Gays are, literally, everywhere—in every family, every business. The backlash seeks to re-close gays, but before it can succeed, it must erase the liberating experiences of millions of men and women. It would be a cruel endeavor indeed, and also self-defeating. Gays have valuable lessons to teach the world—about freedom from roles, the importance of emotion, the varieties of sexuality—and if given the chance, people will learn what is best for them.

# High and Low Lesbian

## A Gay Woman's Guide to New York

By Lita Lepie

**Paula's,**  
64 Greenwich Avenue

Neighborhood bar to chat in before, after, or instead of the more cruisey bars. The pool table beckons and "Flash" pinball entices. *Without pretension. Men, too, and no hassles.*

**Peaches Club,**  
1201 Lexington Avenue

Friday and Saturday, \$3 cover entitles one free drink.

Decor features leftover Christmas tree branches painted white and festooned with pin lights. Scattered ferns also sport pin lights. A large Minnie Mouse cutout adorns the white stucco walls. There is a half-white piano. The dance floor is tiny. The new juke box presents possibilities: "Hot Stuff," and Bonnie Pointer belts out the latest counterrevolutionary anthem. "Free me from my freedom/Tie me to a tree." *An old lover described the crowd as prehistoric. I said, "But cute."*

**Claudio's,**  
289 Bleecker Street

You won't feel comfortable necking; the straights won't either. You will be treated well. The food is sublime; the atmosphere correct. Entrees \$5-\$15. *One drawback: It's too popular.*

**La Femme,**  
85 Washington Place

Closed Monday and Tuesday. Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday, \$3 entitles one drink. Friday and Saturday, \$3 cover. Gay men welcome.

Ten years ago, places like this were the rule. Sinister-looking men sit and take your money. They lurk in the dance room. The walk to the disco is like a stroll through the wild side. *A bad dream.*

**Dutchess,**

70 Grove Street (at Sheridan Square)  
Friday and Saturday after 9 p.m., \$3 entitles one drink.

The decor is World War II bomb shelter. The crowd seems hospitable. They aren't. They are a lot of feminists. There's no sexual energy. Everyone is white. In winter they wear flannels and dungarees. In summer, carpenter pants and Lacoste or something similar. The jukebox remains annoying easy-listening music. *No one here would ever rape you. It's very popular.*

**Silhouette,**

53 West 19th Street

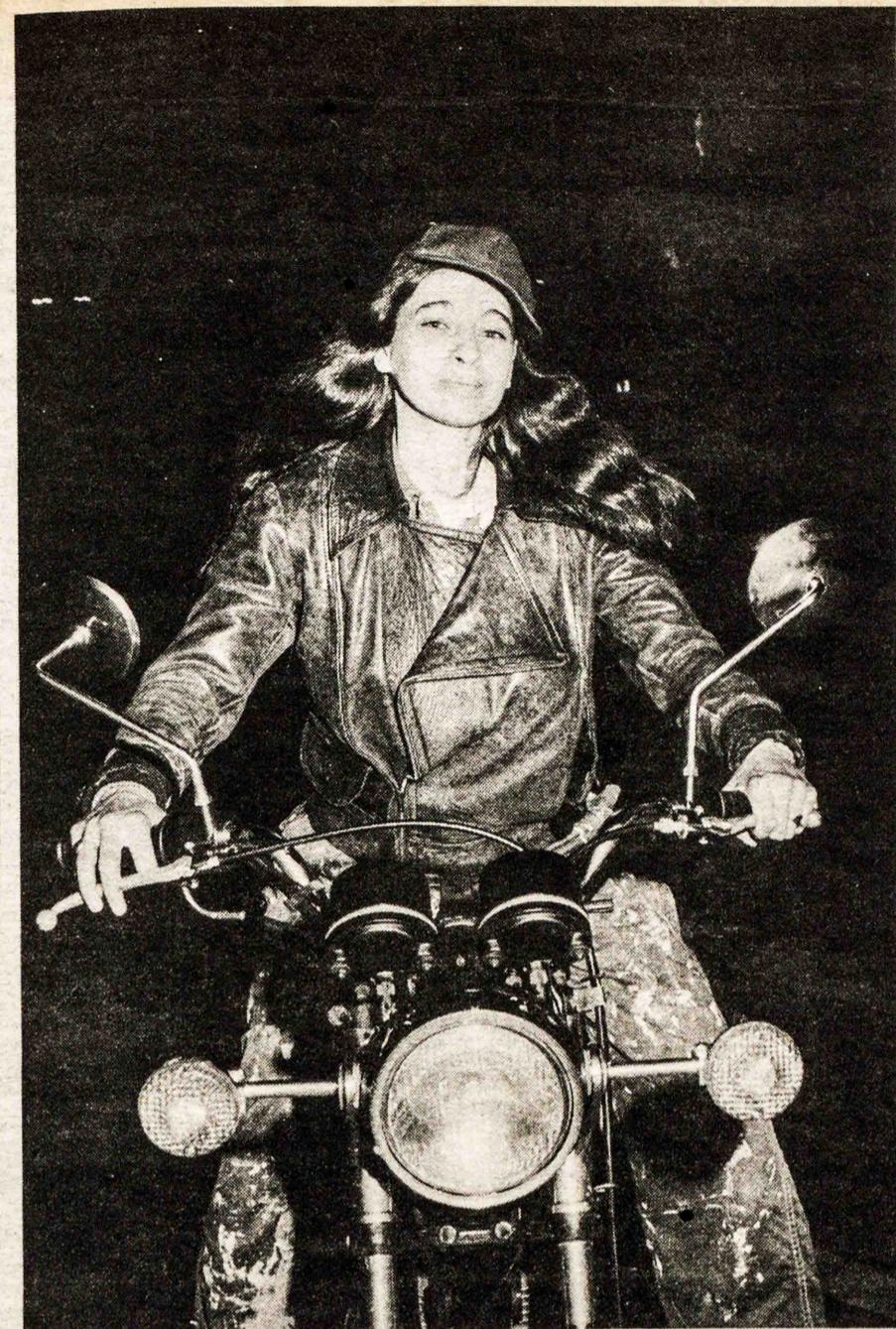
Closed Sunday-Tuesday; Friday and Saturday, \$3 entertainment fee. Gay men welcome.

My first bar. Basically unchanged. Disproves what Aunt Rose says in a Grace Paley story: "Well, by now you must know yourself, honey, whatever you do, life don't stop. It only sits a minute and dreams a dream." The scene is from Fellini: plastic bunches of grapes dangle from the red ceiling which is flecked with gold paint. Trophies from softball and bowling tournaments dot the windows. A woman in a blue sailor suit puffs a stogie. *A bit butch and femmy.*

**Dapper and Friends LTD,**  
380 East 81st Street

Closed Mondays and Tuesdays; \$5 cover Friday and Saturday entitles one drink. Sunday brunch, \$5.50, includes cocktail entree, coffee, 1-5 p.m.; Sunday tea dance, all drinks \$2, 5 to 10 p.m. Gay men welcome except Friday and Saturday.

Although not yet a year old, Dapper's



Woman on a bike

has been soundly trashed by feminists: the owner had waitresses dressed in leotards and tights. She didn't know this was a no-no. I find her naivete adorable. The waitresses now dress conventionally. Both the place and the clientele are elegant. The staff is friendly. The only problem is it gets too crowded on Saturday nights, and one is buffeted about the dance floor. Not a feminist crowd: many women in spiked heels, sexy orange dresses, and revealing disco get-up. A bit butch and femmy. On balance a pleasant, healthy mix of types.

The new Sunday Brunch deserves special mention: the club is transformed to a romantic hideaway. Tables sport white candles, the lighting is low, the food (I tried an apricot omelet made with brandy and preserves) primo. Several tables are built into the walls and framed with white lace drapes which can be closed for total privacy. A warm piano plays. *The brunch is the only event in this city which is High Lesbian.*

**Bonnie's (Upstairs),  
82 West 3rd Street**

A nice place to nibble your lover and nosh. Although they're always busy, Sunday brunch is a ritual. The food won't kill you. Entries are \$6.25-\$10.25. Country, comfy atmosphere. At night if you spend \$8 per person and the waitress likes you, the disco fee (downstairs) will be waived. (I've found it's also waived if you imply that otherwise you won't tip.)

**Bonnie and Clyde's (downstairs)**

Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday \$4

**Seduction  
Techniques**

1. Sing "Wild Is the Wind."
2. Wear either all white or all black.
3. Bring a plant or some flowers. (Cacti are not recommended).
4. Recite a poem.

Want to be a virgin longer? Try this: a few days before your date, go to a sex shop and buy a condom. If you're nervous, take a few deep breaths and relax. You'll be surprised at how easy it is.

gets two drinks. Friday and Saturday, \$5 gets two drinks. (They say men dressed in jacket and tie are okay. I've never seen one inside.)

Heavily third world. Some women occasionally dress creatively. Lots of drugs and leather. A few women carry weapons. *A curious club: both the friendliest place in town and the most predatory.*

**Sahara,**

**1234 Second Avenue**

Wednesday, \$3, all drinks two-for-one; Thursday, \$6, for the show at 11 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays, \$5. Gay men welcome except Friday and Saturday.

Downstairs features a comfortable bar with scattered tables. Upstairs, the dance area is good-sized; the sound system, marvelous; the deejays, adequate. There is a sizable third-world contingent. Entertainment on Thursdays is uneven—occasionally first-class (NBUDA); often entirely mediocre (Isis). The Sahara would warrant more kind words for its almost perfect physical setup, except for the glacial atmosphere which pervades. The staff's so rude that many people boycott (girllcott?). One feels ripped off. My friend Buttercup, exhausted from her rum and cokes and riding her bike all over town, leaned against a barstool. The woman sitting there turned to her and flirted, "After five minutes I charge rent." Buttercup answered, "At this place I'm not surprised."

**Powwows and  
Incantations**

Among the possibilities: Lesbian Feminist Liberation (691-5460); Salsa Soul Sisters (for third-world Women, 799-8243); and Gay Women's Alternative (532-8669). A Lesbian Cultural Festival begins June 17 and will run through July 20. Periodically, there are women's concerts. The Lesbian Switchboard (741-2610) will keep you posted.

*Lita Lepie is presently finishing a novel, The Truth About Football.*



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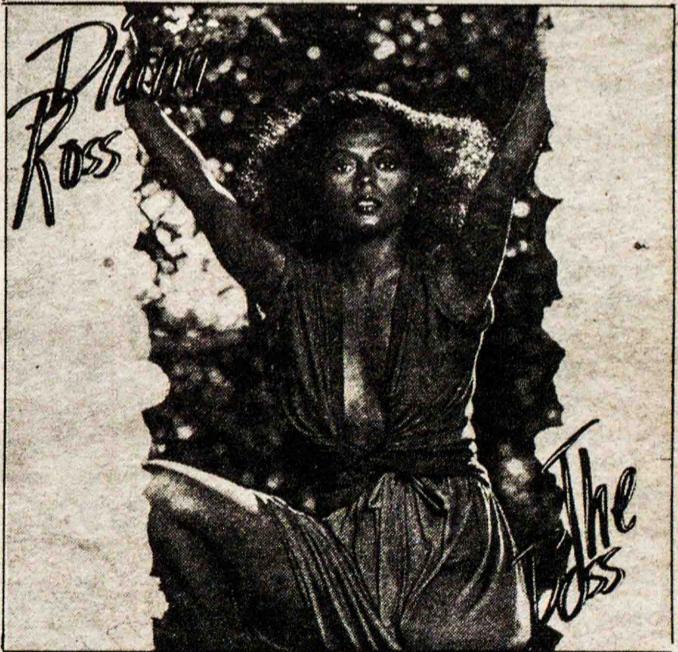
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# Baby Dyke

By Bertha Harris

I steeled myself to meet her. I arranged a composite portrait of Baby Dyke—culled from a decade of lesbian-feminist enterprise, women's dances, and bar-hopping. Her hair would be cropped to Marine Corps regulations—if, indeed, B.D.'s head was not already bald as an egg. Her body would be disguised in the politically correct drape of denim three sizes too large. Despite the heat, she'd be laced into her combat boots in case she had occasion to kick where it hurts most. She would be defiant, ready to pounce if my enfeebled sense of humor hit a political sore spot.

I might say, for instance, "Kid, I'm old enough to be your mother!" And B.D. might reply: "Agist pig!" Words like "agist" would roll easily past her herb tea-stained teeth. On the other hand, B.D. might go easy on me. Even though I admire my ability to make money, once slept with a man, enjoy monogamy, believe that some people are more intellectually interesting than others, and make business arrangements in my favor with members of the other gender—all "politically incorrect" attitudes in the eyes of most Baby Dykes I have known.

Janet Nottley is 16. She lives in Mar Vista, California, a working-class collection of jerry-built apartment buildings and small wooden houses that are subdivided into halves and three-quarters. Janet and her mother, Carol Nottley, and her little sister, Katy, live together at one of the three-quarter addresses—a house behind a house behind a house; but the sea breezes get through their windows anyway.

Janet is tall and slender, with red-gold hair that tumbles past her shoulder blades and a face so lovely it could play first cousin to the Walton family. She radiates the kind of self-assurance, confidence in personal success, and sweetness of temper we most often find in pre-revolutionary fictional duchesses—or, more rarely, in people who have had happy childhoods. I looked and listened hard for some residue of adolescent sullenness, some hankering for "normalcy." But there was nothing of the sort. Janet is happy—and means to stay that way.

According to the happiness-measurement authorities, Janet Nottley should be miserable—at worst, a psychological basketcase; at least, a card-carrying manhater, snarling with rage to kill. "I was my mother's fifth child," she recalls. "Right after I came along, our father deserted us. I didn't meet him until I was 14—and we didn't get along at all!" Janet laughs at her memory of the father who wasn't a father. She doesn't seem to understand that real life teaches us to weep over soap opera.

Carol Nottley remarried and had her last child, Katy. The seven-year remarriage was not, according to Carol Nottley, "a particularly happy time for anyone," and ended in divorce. Typically, neither of the fathers paid child-support regularly, and the burden of feeding, clothing, and educating six children fell entirely on her shoulders. During Janet's childhood and adolescence, the seven Nottleys pulled up stakes and moved back and forth across the country several times.

Moving around a lot as a child gets you another minus from the happiness-measurers. But Janet tells me how she found the pony in rootlessness as well as in fatherlessness. "Being the new kid in school all the time—that, and having red hair—taught me some good lessons in how to stand up for myself. I learned how to fight before I became a lesbian. One day I came home crying over another beating and my Mom told me that if I didn't

defend myself next time, she was going to hit me too. So the next day, when a boy hit me, I hit him back. The principal called up my Mom and accused her of letting me get away with 'unladylike' behavior. My Mom told him she wasn't raising me to be a lady—she was raising me to be strong."

Janet's experience with women seems to have been almost uniformly blissful. Her experience with fathers, grade school thugs, high school machos, and professional villains has been quite the opposite. In St. Louis, she was kidnapped by two men with rape and assault records. "They grabbed me off the porch and stuffed me in their car. They were driving me some place to rape me. It was my training as a feminist that saved me. Instead of crying and getting hysterical, I was very cool, very aloof. I made them think I wasn't going to make a break—and then I did run, and got away." Matter-of-factly, she adds, "Of course they rearranged my face for me some."

"Do you hate men?" I ask.

"No," she answers. "Life has taught me to have a realistic distrust of them. But I'm not a lesbian because I hate men. I'm a lesbian because I love women—and trust women. A lot of women have been through the same things I have and turned out straight. One of my older sisters is straight. My little sister is still too young to make sexual choices—and my Mom wants her to be open to all alternatives. So far in our family, we have three gay members and three straight members."

I count back: Janet and one sister are lesbian. Two brothers are straight. One sister is straight. Katy is undecided.

"My mother's a lesbian, too." Janet explains. "First she came out, then I did—I was 13 at the time: then one of my sisters left her husband and became a lesbian too."

Some people believe it runs in families, I observe, but in the Nottley family it seems to gallop. I tell Janet that I suspect many young women are straight because

they want to be as much like their mothers as possible. Could a gay reversal of this be true of Janet and her mother? Is she gay because she doesn't want to be a heart breaker?

"We were just lucky that things worked out the way they have," Janet replies. "I remember having erotic feelings for women by the time I was five. When the other girls my age were getting crushes on each other I was doing the same. But they were talking about the men they would marry when they grew up."

Janet's first sexual experience was with another girl her age, "not a lover, just a friend."

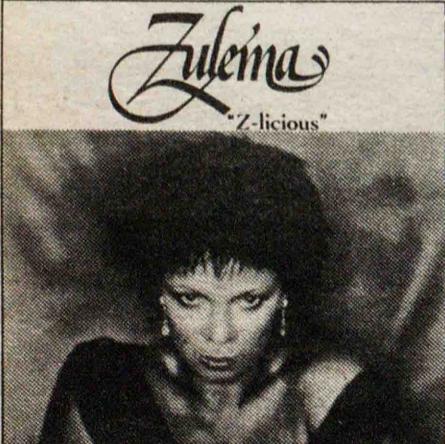
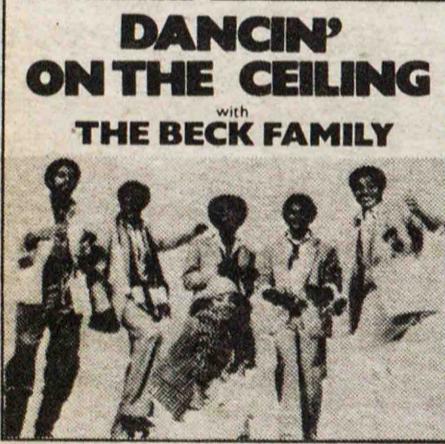
"How many lovers have you had so far?" I ask, remembering the first homosexual encounters of my generation, those gropings in the pitch dark, all that sweating with fear and lust.

"Really only one lover. And we just broke up." She "goes out" with a lot of women. She's had sexual relations with five. But she only calls one a "lover." I look for traces of a broken heart. There are none.

Janet and her mother are committed feminists. Both came out in the context of the women's movement, and almost all of her work has been for gay and feminist organizations or women's enterprises. She's been most deeply affected by her training and practice as a lay health-care worker in Oakland and Los Angeles women's clinics. When she was barely in her teens, Janet was taking pap smears, testing for gonorrhea and giving abortion and pregnancy counseling. Janet graduated from high school a few months ago by taking a comprehensive exam. In the fall, she will enter Santa Monica College as a pre-med student. In two years, she'll transfer to UCLA—and eventually reappear as a bona fide gynecologist-obstetrician. She hopes to practice midwifery.

Janet wishes she could be two people. While her great commitment is to better health-care for women, her "great love" is acting. I remind her that both medicine

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The staff of Identity House

and show business are professions controlled by some very conventional people. Has she ruined her chances? "I know they don't want lesbian actresses because actresses can turn into role models—and they don't want lesbian role models for young people. But I decided a long time ago that I'm not going to pretend anything or hide anything to get what I want to get. Anything at all."

The last 16-year-old female I talked to admires Elvis Costello above all others and has a T-shirt to prove it. With that

in mind, I ask Janet if she has any heroines in her life? She hesitates, as though the idea, much less the experience of worshipping-at-the-feet, has never occurred to her.

"Molly Bolt," she finally answers. "Because Molly's life in *Rubyfruit Jungle* makes me think of myself."

Anybody real?

"Susan B. Anthony. I think I'm a lot like Molly—but I want to model myself after a woman like Susan B. Anthony. And then, there're all those brilliant movement

women my mother and I got to know when we became feminists. They're still major influences, major support."

But there's no passion in Janet's voice when she talks about brilliant movement women and Molly Bolt and Susan B. Anthony. "Really," she laughs, "my mother is my idol." Then she adds, "My mother and her lover. I learned from her that you can change every day of your life. I could change so much I might even want to get married and have children some day. But I just laugh at that."

stereotyped, even when the pressure to conform comes from an area of the women's movement. "I shocked an entire women's dance one time by showing up in a skirt. Who's to say what someone should or should not wear in order to be a right-on lesbian?"

She thinks of androgyny as a combination of both masculine and feminine attitudes, a borderline between genders. "It's independence from both sexes. It's a freeing from all roles," she explains.

What kind of pain has Janet had to live through as a right-on lesbian? Isn't there something that a perfect mother, feminism, Susan B. Anthony, and a close family unit can't protect her from?

She withdraws perceptibly. She discourages discussion that isn't about finding the pony. "I lost a close friend," she says. "After I came out, my friend figured I'd turned into some kind of monster and was going to attack her. That hurt. A lot of straight women think like that."

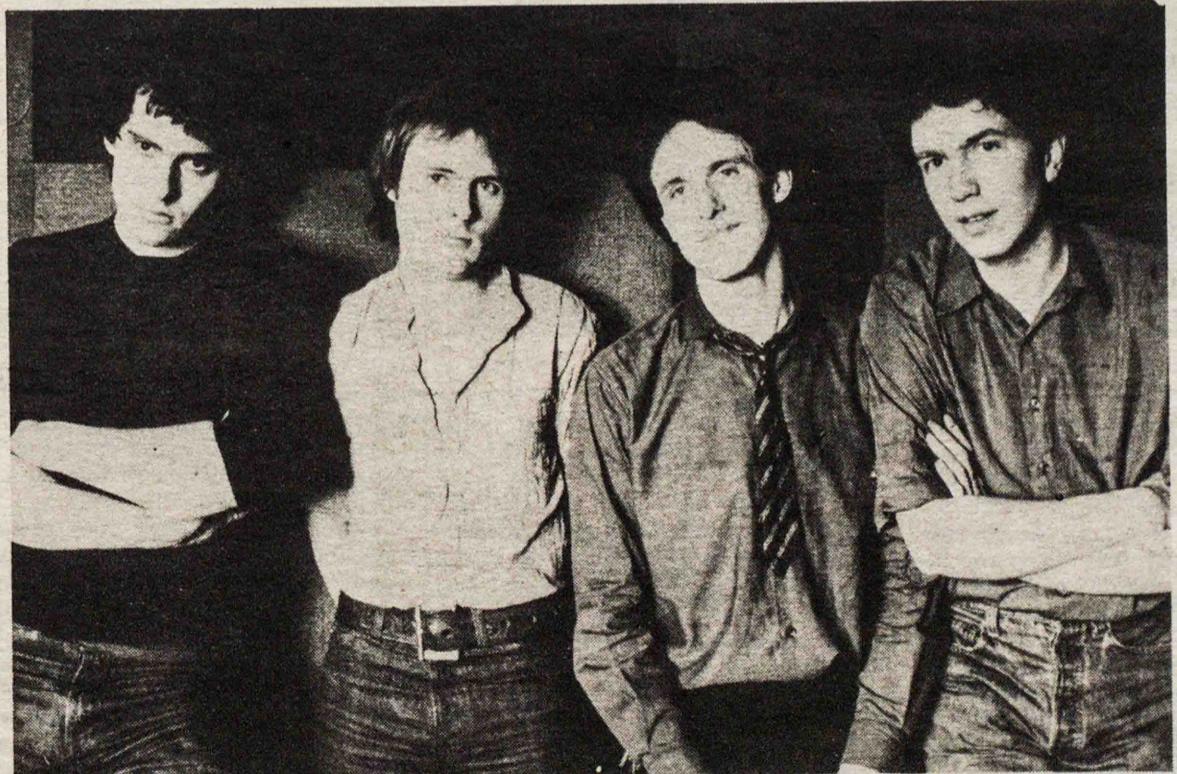
And?

"And," she adds, "there are people—teachers mostly—who tell me I'm sick because I'm not ashamed of being gay. Not that I'm sick because I'm gay—but because I'm not ashamed. 'Gay and Proud' is a good slogan. But for me, I'm proud of not being ashamed. That's a little different."

Janet doesn't expect things to get much better in her generation. "It's going to take hundreds and hundreds of years." In the meantime, she wants to make money; she wants to make sure that all women get all the money and power and health care they need. She'll work on that. And she'll go on loving her mother.

Bertha Harris is the author of three novels—*Catching Saradove*, *Confessions of Cherubino*, and *Lover*—and co-author of *The Joy of Lesbian Sex*. She has just completed a novel for young adults.

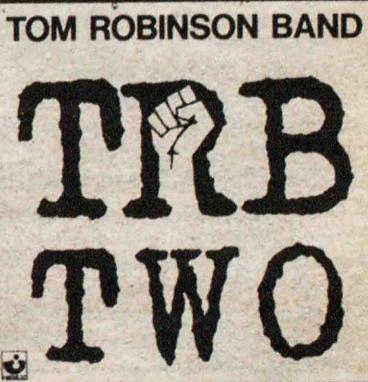
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# The Politics of Drag

By Edmund White

Most people feel awkward around drags — uneasy, even frightened. So many of our social responses are dictated by our recognition of someone's gender, which we generally assume coincides with his or her sex. Confronting a man dressed as a woman jams our social signals and frustrates our habitual social responses. If we can be temporarily alarmed by a foreigner who swoops down to kiss our hand or who ceremoniously makes a rude noise to indicate his appreciation of dinner, then small wonder we are even more dismayed by someone whom we don't know whether to call "he" or "she."

But mere social discomfort is the least of our problems. Far more significant is the threat posed by the drag queen to our sense of identity. It has become fashionable to say that a man secure in his masculinity will not object to transvestism, but even that hypothetical creature may find drag queens unnerving. The sources of this queasiness, I'd submit, are historical and cognitive. Historically, gay men have been branded as effeminate. Since 1969 and the birth of gay liberation, however, homosexual men have rigorously rejected the effeminate label — and, if seen in the correct light, this redefinition can only be commended. Social labels have a nasty way of defining behavior, and homosexuals, like other minority groups that have had a taste of freedom and self-respect, have rejected the demeaning stereotypes imposed on them. Gay men today are assuming the most blatant badges of manliness, which in America is always associated with the working class.

The drag queen appears all the more isolated and fragile among so many burly men. I am not referring to heterosexual transvestites, since their fear of being unmasked usually makes them inconspicuous, even invisible. I am speaking of gays, whether they be show drags (those who dress up only to perform in clubs or at contests) or street drags (those who live their whole lives in women's clothes). The gay drag is also more despised than ever because she reminds the new macho gays of what they once were, or might have been. At the very time when many homosexual men are learning that they can be both gay and butch, along comes this bizarre specter, teetering on spike heels under pounds of lacquered hair, her face painted and powdered above her prominent Adam's apple, her clothes a fantasy of outdated frills and finery.

Historically, then, the drag queen stands as an unpleasant reminder of discarded effeminacy. But I have also said that she makes us uneasy on a cognitive level. Cognitive psychologists would say that, despite surface variations, there appear to be abiding categories of thought wired into our brains. For instance, there seems to be a basic human urge to analyze experience through pairs of opposites. The exact contents of the categories may differ, but the drive to make such distinctions prevails. Some that spring to mind are: pure and defiled, ours and theirs, taboo and permitted. Surely one of the most universal of these dichotomies is male and female — or rather, since we are speaking of gender rather than sex, masculine and feminine. In almost every group of people, a great deal of effort is expended to make these distinctions as sharp as possible — differences in dress, vocabulary, manners, attitudes. Since gender differences are also reinforced by economics — the sexual division of labor — they are all the more difficult to eradicate.

Even when gender is systematically de-

emphasized, the separation between masculine and feminine continues: for example, a group of feminist teachers worked with kindergartners in an environment where boys and girls were encouraged to dress, speak, and play alike and where all gender differences were discouraged. Despite such efforts, the children remained acutely aware of gender distinctions and could be overheard saying, "Boys don't do that," or "That's only for girls," and so on. These mental habits persisted even when the gender-identified behavior was precisely the opposite of what society at large regards as proper masculine and feminine behavior.

Thus a boy might be heard saying to a girl, "Don't touch my doll. Dolls are for boys, not girls." These ideas are discussed more fully in *Psychology of Sex Differences* by Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin.

a misfit is not revered he is despised, and this is the position of the drag queen in both homosexual and heterosexual white society in America.

In recent years the drag queen has been attacked by another group — lesbian feminists. Some Lesbians perceive drags as mocking women, all the more so because the drags so often get themselves up in the very guises that liberated women have been at such pains to discard — show girls, sex kittens, fashion models. As far as I can make out, lesbian feminists think that drags (1) mock women by imitating them and (2) doubly insult them by imitating unliberated women.

Not all feminists have subscribed to this view. As long ago as 1970, Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* saw the drag as a useful subversion: "... as she minces along a street in the Village, the storm of outrage an insouciant queen in drag may

The effect of their behavior can be diverse — lesbian feminists consider it offensive; straight audiences at a nightclub find it entertaining; many gay men find it threatening.

Disdain for drag is, I would contend, often concealed snobbism. Most gay transvestites especially street drags, are from the working class and many drags are either black or Puerto Rican. Discrimination against them may be both elitist and racist. The greatest irony, of course, is that the Stonewall Resistance itself and many of the other early gay street actions were led by transvestites.

As for why drag queens have singled out prostitutes and show girls to imitate, the explanation may be at least partially historical. Certainly gay men have seldom impersonated middle-class housewives or aristocratic hostesses. The gay hissing and bitch sessions, the vulgar put-downs and the half-funny, half-serious rivalries parallel the catty remarks of whores and chorus-line gypsies. In Jonathan Katz's *Gay American History* one discovers several clues. A cited article published in 1896 about the "fairies" of New York states: "They are fond of the actor's life, and particularly that of the comedian requiring the dressing in female attire, and the singing in imitation of a female voice, in which they often excel." Testimony given to the New York police in 1899 has this to say of male prostitutes: "These men that conduct themselves there — well, they act effeminately; most of them are painted and powdered; they are called Princess this and Lady So and So and the Duchess of Marlboro, and get up and sing as women, and dance; ape the female character; call each other sisters and take people out for immoral purposes." In 1893 a medical journal published a note about a black drag ball in Washington, D.C.: "In this sable performance of sexual perversion all of these men are lasciviously dressed in womanly attire, short sleeves, low-necked dresses and the usual ballroom decorations and ornaments of women, feathered and ribbed head-dresses, garters, frills, flowers, ruffles, etc., and deport themselves as women."

Obviously, then, many of the early drag queens actually were prostitutes. Others, such as the black queens in Washington, may have found that the worlds of the theatre and prostitution were the only ones where overt homosexuals were welcome. Most likely is the hypothesis that homosexuality in all its forms was so forbidden that only in the permissive world of prostitution could it be mentioned at all. Closeted homosexuals were speechless; only those who had entered a milieu of prostitution and show biz could discuss their sexuality. As a result, even today a small but essential gay male vocabulary can be traced back to whores' slang, including *trick, box, trade, number, hustle, score*, and so on. Modern homosexuality arises with the growth of industry and big cities; once men could become self-sufficient (if alienated) laborers, they could reject family life and live as bachelors. But even so, only the most oppressed outcasts of gay life — the drag queens — dared to speak openly of their sexuality. Contemporary drag is a reminder of our beginnings.

I have tried to touch upon the most confusing and complex issues that swirl around the question of drag. But I would be evading my responsibilities if I did not state that I believe transvestites have been treated very unfairly by lesbians and gay men and that they must be fully accepted into our ranks (scattered and in disarray as those ranks may be). Recently, some gay strategists have taken a stand against all forms of eccentricity in gays, and especially against transvestism, on the grounds that unusual dress and behavior can only hurt the cause of homosexuals in general. As long as drags, leather men, radicals and "media freaks" are unmuzzled and conspicuous, or so the theory goes, then straight society will continue to frown on all gays and deny us our rights.

Interestingly, the National Organization of Women was faced with an analogous problem a few years ago — whether to accept or reject its lesbian



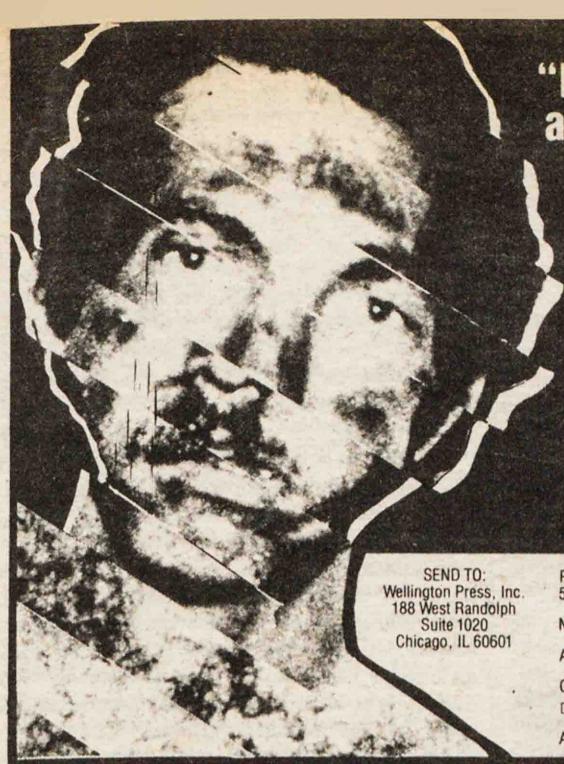
Marsha Johnson

In studying other cultures, anthropologists have found that people tend to be suspicious of anything that falls between two categories. The Hebrew taboo against eating lobsters, for instance, may arise from the fact that they are interstitial animals. Sea-dwelling animals, fish, have flippers and swim; land-dwelling animals have legs and walk. The lobster, however, inhabits the sea but has legs. It falls between two categories and is therefore taboo.

Not surprisingly, the drag queen, occupying the interstice between masculine and feminine, is troublesome. Interstitial entities are usually handled in one of two ways — they are either despised or revered. Interestingly, there are many cases, especially among black Americans, of drags being revered. When I was in my teens the Prophet Jones in Detroit was the leader of a popular religious cult; he wore make-up, articles of feminine attire and a full ermine coat, presented to him by his devotees. Little Richard, with his lipstick, high-heels, satins, and bouffant hairdo was another such shaman. But if

call down is due to the fact that she is both masculine and feminine at once — or male, but feminine. She has made gender identity more than frighteningly easy to lose; she has questioned its reality at a time when it has attained the status of a moral absolute and a social imperative. She has defied it and actually suggested its negation. She has dared obloquy, and in doing so has challenged more than the taboo on homosexuality, she has uncovered what the source of this contempt implies — the fact that sex role is sex rank."

I think the feminists' discussion of drag has been muddled by a failure to distinguish between the intentions of the queen and the effects of her behavior on others. Many of the drags I have interviewed across the country seem to have rather modest ambitions — to be "glamorous," to be "stars," to amuse audiences and to convince unsuspecting straights that they are "real women." They generally look confused and bewildered when they are accused of mocking women; quite the contrary, many of them wish to be women.



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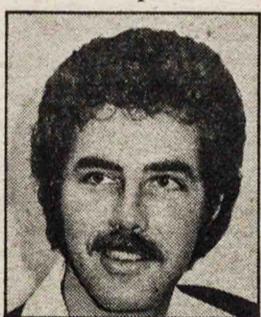
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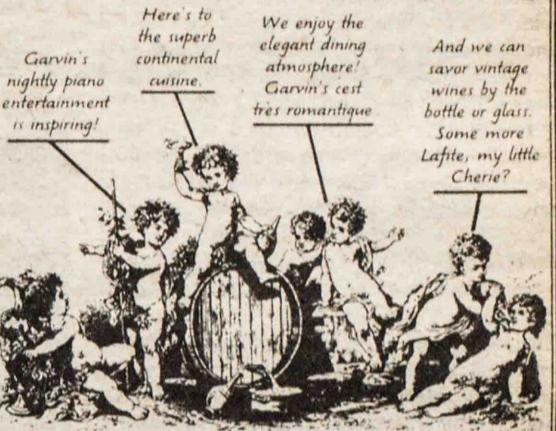
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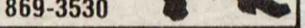
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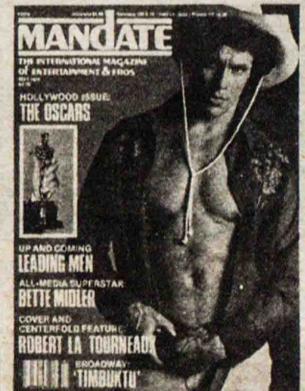
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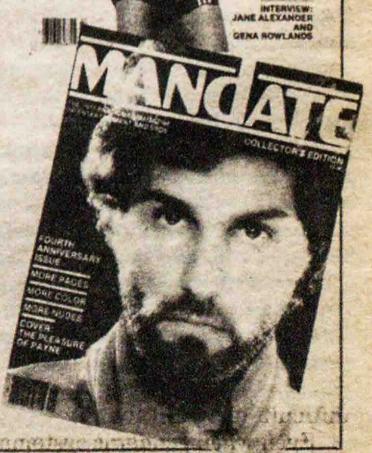
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contingent. Those feminists who opposed the lesbians did so because they feared that if NOW were linked to lesbianism in the public mind, then the entire organization would be branded and dismissed as suspect by non-lesbian women. Those who endorsed the lesbians argued that if lesbians have traditionally been singled out as scapegoats, then they can just as easily serve as leaders and symbols of feminist solidarity. The decision to stand behind lesbians won out.

I think that lesbians and gays should take a similar stand on drags. To accept transvestites is not only humane but also tactically wise. All of the objections that straights and gays might have to drags are merely condensed and heightened objections to male homosexuality. A survey of straights published in the *Journal of Homosexuality* revealed that most straight people do not object to sex between two adult men. What they dislike is self-definition as homosexual. Coming out of the closet is what riles straight people; you will recall that even Anita Bryant does not object to teachers being gay, she simply does not want them to announce they are gay. Once someone comes out of the closet, once a gay man defines himself socially as gay, then he becomes disturbing. Avowedly gay men, as the survey revealed, are perceived by straight society as women. The anger against gay men (and it is much stronger than that against gay women) arises from the fact that gay men are seen as deliberately and perversely renouncing their prerogatives as men and accepting the lower status of women. Because gay men are perceived as choosing to be women—that is, inferior—they arouse scorn, fear, and confusion.

These are the same feelings that drags awaken in everyone, of course. Drags have become the new "queers" of gay life. For that reason, our reactions to them are a sure index of our own homophobia. By embracing drags, lesbians, and especially gay men will take a step towards self-acceptance. By placing drags in a respected position within the movement, gays will have elevated and defended what straight society most despises in all homosexuals.

*Edmund White's next book will be States of Desire: Travels in Gay America. He has written two novels, Forgetting Elena and Nocturne for the King of Naples. He authored The Joy of Gay Sex with Charles Silverstein.*

# The Drag of Politics

By Steve Watson

"Gay people aren't fighting anymore," drawled Marsha P. Johnson, 34. "They don't care as long as they have a bar to go to. You know that, darling. But when I came down here 10 years ago, I caught the drift the minute I walked into Sheridan Square. I said, 'It's about time, honey.'

We were sitting in the Bagel And, originally the Stonewall bar, where resistance to police raids started gay liberation 10 years ago. This evening the space around us aspired to sleek wholesomeness instead of the warm sleaze of an unmarked, underlit gay bar—hanging plants instead of go-go boys. But despite the changes over 10 years, Marsha looks the same, still in his drag that is vibrantly out of tune with the times. When Marsha saunters up Christopher Street, a younger generation of ersatz cowboys and truckers looks at him as a plumed curiosity: why would anyone want to do that?

Marsha's drag the night we talked was

merely a functional layering of coat over sweatshirt over a florid blouse; it had been a rainy day on the streets. But no weather could keep costume-jewelry earrings from Marsha's hair, nor the red plastic high heels from coming out of his bag once we were away from the puddles. Marsha patted a dab of rouge on his brown cheeks, added a scent of faded cologne, focused on me, on the potato salad, on the air, and continued on in his lazily singsong voice. "I was in lots of raids before. All the street queens were. The paddy wagon was a regular routine. We used to sit in our little 42nd Street hotel rooms—'hot spring hotels,' they used to call them—and party and get high and think about walking down the street someday and not worry about getting busted by the police. That was a dream we all had, sitting in those hotel rooms or in the queens' tanks of the jails. So, honey, when it came that night, I was ready to tip a few cars for a dream. It was that year—1969—when I finally went out in the street in drag full-time. I just said, 'I don't give a shit,' and I've been in drag most of the time since."

As gay liberation changed from a re-

a half-dead movement.

Marsha's position on Christopher Street is double-edged. A martyr of gay liberation, he is denied entrance to many bars. Andy Warhol silkscreens of Marsha sell for \$1400 in a Christopher Street shop gallery while Marsha walks the sidewalk outside, broke.

Marsha recently appeared in a Hot Peaches show celebrating the Pope's death. In honor of the occasion, Marsha was a nun for a night in a white habit and green-glittered eyes. He pulled out a crumpled paper and sang from it: "Climb Every Mountain," every verse, his voice wandering a capella up and down the scale. The audience, stoned and silent, hardly breathed, and then rose at once in honor. Marsha's power with his followers is hard to describe, but it is undeniable. When friends describe him, they invariably use words like "saint," "charismatic queen," and "myth." In fact, Marsha was formally canonized years ago in a ceremony conducted by the Angels of Light and the Hot Peaches.

Some of Marsha's charisma is simply due to his survival power. His past life

His plumed saintliness is volatile, however; two weeks after his night as a nun, Marsha was in Riker's Island again after striking a Ty's bartender who had refused his patronage. It was not an isolated incident. One Christopher Street shop manager called Marsha a "bully underneath that soft sweet manner." Others have cited Marsha's toughness, and Sylvia Rivera recalls he first met Marsha in a drag-out fight with a street queen who had pulled Marsha's Halloween wig from his head. Aggression has been a necessary part of Marsha's life. It doesn't make friends on Christopher Street.

"This last breakdown, I was fighting with everyone. I don't like getting in those fights, but when they say you can't stay and you don't know why... When I'm having a breakdown it seems like I meet all these weird people, all these strangers who don't understand gay people coming around. I know something is coming on and I light my candles and incense and pray to my saints. Sometimes I have visions. In one of them, there were 10 suns shining in the sky, gorgeous and freaked out, like the end of the world. I love my



Deanna of the High Tea bakery and Bernice Goodman, psychotherapist, at home

sistance against police raids into a full-fledged movement, Marsha and fellow street transvestite Sylvia Rivera organized their people. Sylvia and Marsha knew each other from days of waiting tables at Child's Restaurant. They were a tough duo. The street transvestites became the vanguard of the movement: S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries). By 1971, they had their own communal house on 15th Street. It had only four rooms, and the landlord had turned the electricity off, but it became a home for a floating population of 20 street queens, living by candlelight, sleeping everywhere, including the bathtub. Marsha became the mother of the S.T.A.R. house, and for a year and a half those four rooms were a warm respite from the streets.

It didn't last long. Nothing could stave off the problem of rent. By July 1971, the house had closed and the street transvestites lost favor in gay liberation. S.T.A.R. dispersed. Some overdosed, some were stabbed by johns. Sylvia Rivera retired to a domestic life upstate as a food preparer. Looking back, Marsha merely says, "You know how people are. They're very close at one time and after a while they just go away." Marsha is one of the few who has remained—a walking relic of

would have destroyed many: several attempts on his life by johns, eight nervous breakdowns (by Marsha's count); more than 100 arrests (Marsha doesn't count any more). A revolving door life, from the streets to Riker's Island to Bellevue to Central Islip Hospital to the Tombs.

But to his admirers, Marsha represents more than streetwise survival. He can turn conventional values on their head, publicly affirming his differentness, making beauty from the most unlikely materials. Marsha's camp-garbage aesthetic is shared by many street transvestites—affordable, democratic taste—but Marsha is an acknowledged leader. "Marsha caught on like wildfire," Bob (formerly Flash) Storm remembers, "and set all these new trends in dressing. She was the abundance and beauty of the street trash. And flowers, always flowers. Going after this sky-high energy with extreme makeup and colored wigs and pins and jewelry. She looked like an ornament when she was done." Marsha's transformation defies masculinity, but he is still a far cry from feminine—his out-sized features protruding beneath the makeup, flamboyant clothes set on a six-foot body, muscled arms and legs. Marsha eludes gender and ends up a countercultural saint of transformation.

saints, darling, but sometimes the visions can be scary."

Marsha wasn't always a mythic figure, of course. He was once Malcolm Michaels, a church boy from Elizabeth, New Jersey. "I went every Sunday, honey, because I wanted to learn about Jesus. I always thought gayness was some sort of dream, something people talked about but never did. So I remained asexual for 17 years, until I left New Jersey and came to New York. It didn't look too gay, until I saw all these nelly things hustling near the Howard Johnson's at 6th Avenue and 8th Street." Malcolm Michaels soon put on a blond wig and became Marsha P. (for "Pay it no mind") Johnson.

"For the last 17 years," Marsha said, "my life has been built around sex and gay liberation, being a drag queen and dating all the time. It can get very boring you know, darling, all these men. Sometimes they hassle me if they thought I was a woman when they picked me up. I just say: 'Honey, this is like Macy's Department Store. If you like the merchandise, you take it. If you don't, I got to go.' I'd like to stop hustling and have a regular husband. It's easy to get a husband, but it's not easy to get them to support me, or pay the bills, or give up sex. Because, honey, gay men don't give up sex for any-

thing. My best husband—I met him dating—was a junkie and he got shot in a robbery. He wasn't a very good man, but he used to give me everything. I've had eight husbands and eight separations and none of them have given me a white house and picket fence."

Marsha's residence is spread out. "I've been 86ed from a lot of places—Ty's, Boots and Saddles, the Ramrod, the Silver Dollar, G.G. Knickerbockers, Keller's, the Limelight—so I spend most of my time on Christopher Street or under the West Side Highway." Marsha sleeps at the Beacon Baths (\$7 a night), keeps his wardrobe in a Port Authority locker, makes up at department store sample counters (this morning it was Lord and Taylor, but the regular rotation includes Bloomingdale's, Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue, B. Altman). "It's hard work, being beautiful, when you don't have a place. I do my best though," Marsha drawled, putting another earring in his hair and spearing another piece of potato salad. "I'm trying to get my own place so I can have my wardrobe and I can set up my candles to the saints, my own altar. I haven't had my own altar in

# What Is This Thing Called...

By Blanche McCrary Boyd

*I am a Christian, Lord,  
but I'm a woman too.*

—Tammy Wynette, singing  
"Womanhood"

When I was still living in New York, I gave a party to watch Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* on television. I thought this

I do not hang out with brilliant, ironic friends. Instead I spend lazy days with a group of people who cultivate their pleasures as meticulously as they cultivate their summer vegetable gardens. I find my new friends' lifestyles as exotic as they find my ambitiousness. "Why do you work so hard?" one of them asked me. "I don't know," I said, and stopped. For a while I let my days evolve into explorations of how tanned I could get, and my evenings into bouts of pinball and pool and disco dancing. If I get any more laidback, I told my new friends, I'll have to be mounted on rollers.

But when Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* played on television again, I didn't give another party to watch it. The rerun was an expanded eight-hour version, offered as a mini-series. I cleared my social schedule, stocked my refrigerator, rolled a tiny mountain of joints, and settled in for a week of psychodrama with Jesus. This time I would laugh and cry in private. A number of interesting things happened to me watching Jesus, but the relevant one for this essay is that during the second installment, while Jesus talked tenderly to

reexamining *If Jesus Came to My House*. I like the pictures and the rhymes and the unselfish message, and I like Jesus's little halo. When I look at Jesus's halo, I think about the rosy nimbus that settled inexorably around each of my lovers.

Counting Deborah, I've been in love six times. The first time I felt a tremendous innocence. I even felt cleansed. I was more sexually aroused than I'd ever been, and I spent several weeks wandering through an erotic haze. I remember walking back to my apartment in Boston early one February morning feeling quite dizzy with elation. The snow on the brick street in Back Bay was pocked and gritty, and the garbage can at my front door had spilled. The label from a can of green beans blew against my leg. I looked at the trashy street and saw it transformed: The green beans label against my leg was utterly beautiful. I remember thinking *I've never been this happy*. I also remember thinking *this must have a price*. A few months later, when I was drinking myself dumb and mumbling *I can't live without her*, I paid my debts. Not only were my emotions clichéd, they were overwhelming. I felt dreadful, but I felt trivialized as well.

The second time I fell in love I was braced for it. Like the flu, I knew I'd catch it again. This time I moved through my lines with graceful detachment. Not surprisingly, the affair didn't last long.

Then I met another woman I couldn't live without. Sex with her felt holy. She left her husband, I left my girlfriend, and we moved in together. My sense of magic receded, and I tried frantically to retrieve it. Within a few months I began to stutter. I began to whisper. I had trouble finishing sentences. One day I started to cry in the Post Office. When this woman left me I took one hundred and five aspirins to soothe my headache, but after I was released from the hospital she hadn't changed her mind.

I recovered.

As the years passed, I met a couple of other women I couldn't live without. With one of them I lived happily for a long time. *I'll never leave you*, I kept telling her. Now I know that when I say forever, I mean about five years. My breakup with R. was extremely painful, but I was not suicidal. After all, I wrote to a former professor, how many names can you cry in the night?

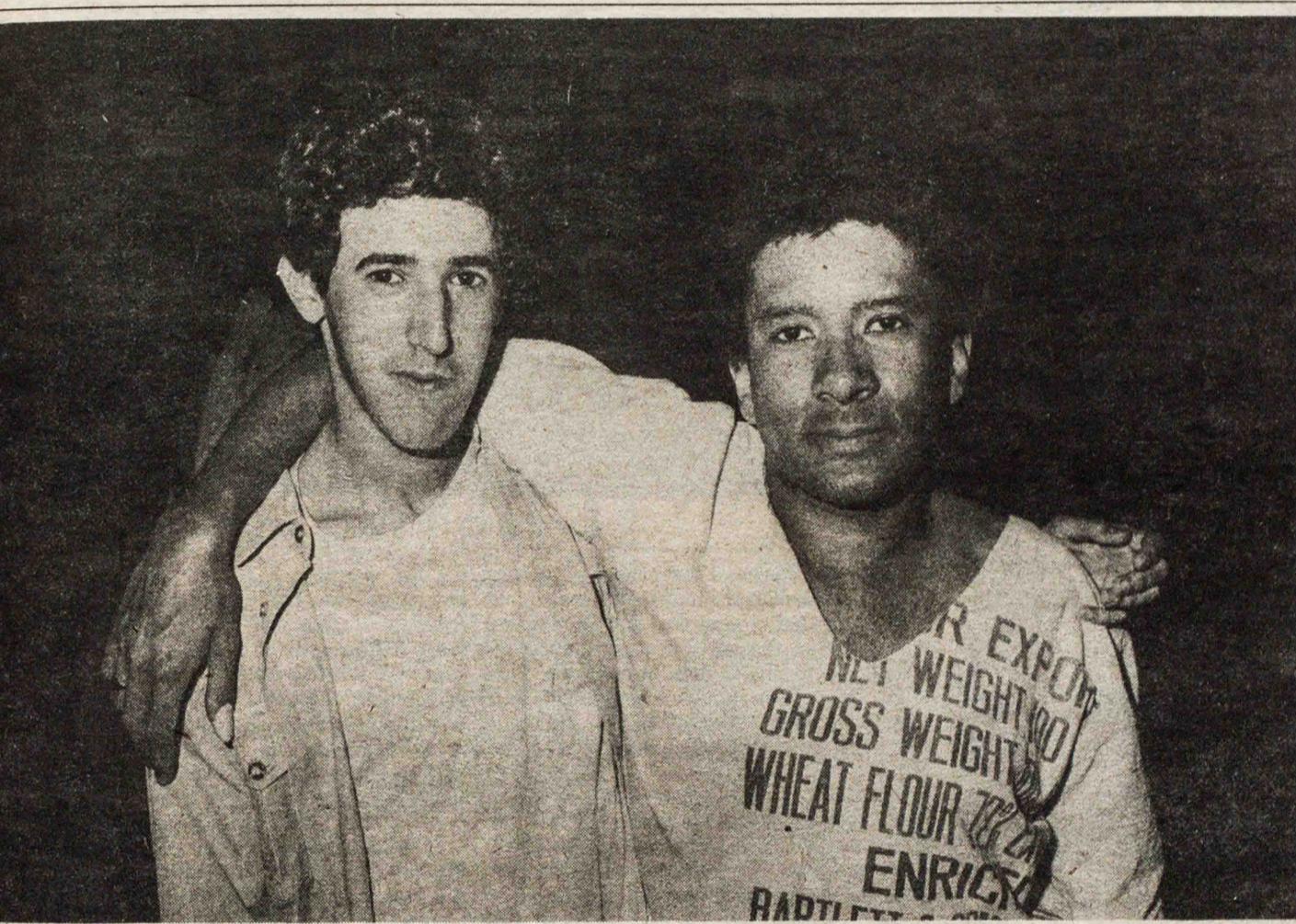
R. and I separated a year ago. At first I concentrated on what I called the Lamaze method of emotional survival: If I could breathe evenly enough, pain was just another interesting experience. My libido felt like a marble rattling around in a box. I had a few crazed sexual reactions, but I didn't fall in love. Slowly, I realized that one reason I resisted ending my relationship with R. was that I simply couldn't fool myself into running the same patterns again. Leaving R. would involve the death of something larger than that relationship.

And where would I be without passion? How would I organize my time? *I know what I'll do*, I announced to anyone who would listen. *I'll go back to Charleston*. I called my mother, from whom I'd been estranged. *Come on home*, she said. *After all, tomorrow is another day*.

So I came home, to puzzle over old plantations tucked among housing developments, tunnel-like highways with mossy oaks arched over them, pungent cascades of flowers, antebellum neighborhoods—the whole culture of antiques. I sat on the Battery, where the Civil War began. I wore a T-shirt that says CHARLESTON, CHARLESTON, CHARLESTON, CHARLESTON. I am so glad to be home that twice I've lain down on the ground and hugged it. My love for Charleston has provided me with a respite from more painful passions. I've had a lot of time to think about what happened in my life.

The word passion originally meant suffering, agony, as of a martyr. The passion of Christ and all that. No wonder being in love made me feel out of control.

Love is an altered state; it changes our vision. I remember the first moment I saw R. transformed. We were sitting on a hillside in Vermont, admiring the landscape. I thought R. was nice-looking, and that she was pleasant in bed; I didn't



Students at a Columbia University gay dance

a long time. Maybe by the time of the gay pride parade I will have an apartment so I can invite my friends up for cocktails." Later, talking with Marsha's friends, I find that Marsha is always looking for apartments; he rarely gets one.

Marsha will carry a GAY LOVE banner in this year's parade, his ninth. "When I started I carried the S.T.A.R. banner, and then it became the GAY POOR PEOPLE banner and it's been GAY LOVE for the last couple years. I think that says everything. All the gay love party will do is give gay birthday parties. I'd like to give birthday parties for Charles Ludlam, Jackie Curtis, Harry Koutoukas, Bob Kohler, Sylvia Rivera, Bambi L'Amour, Bob Storm, Holly Woodlawn, John John, and the Hot Peaches. I think that's the "best organization for now."

Marsha finished his bowl of potato salad, knocked back the last drop of a soda, shook the earrings in his hair, and walked into Sheridan Square. "It's changed, honey, this street is a different place. But when it gets down to it, it's money that rules the world, and Lucifer is coming. Yes he is. In the meantime, spare change for a dying queen, darling?"

gathering would be just the right combination of sophisticated and weird; my friends and I would smoke dope, drink wine, and be smartly detached from an old story. I like trashy epics, from *The Poseidon Adventure* to *The Ten Commandments*, and I like retellings, maybe because as a child I was taken to see *Gone with the Wind* six times. Anyway, whatever else you might say about Jesus, he was an interesting man, and he's at least as important as Einstein.

My friends thought such a party was sophisticated and weird. However, they did not realize, until the show actually started, that I intended to watch every minute of it. All three hours of it. During the Resurrection I was sitting by myself in a cloud of reefer. Most of my friends had gone home. A few remained in the kitchen, drinking wine and talking. It was better that I was alone because I was not acting smartly detached. Instead I kept laughing and crying. This behavior did not seem sophisticated and weird, merely weird. David, who used to be my editor, was the last to leave. "It's all right," he said, holding my hand. "I like Jesus too." David is one of the few people I know to whom I'd apply the abused word brilliant. He is not a happy man. "Southerners," he added, "are so Southern."

I am living in my hometown now, where

his disciple Thomas, I found myself jerking off. Jesus, I realized, reminded me of a woman I used to be in love with. According to Zeffirelli, Jesus didn't blink. This woman, whose name was Deborah, never seemed to blink either. Looking at her eyes, I often had the sensation I was falling into them. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, Deborah's could have flown in or out easily. She made me feel forgiven.

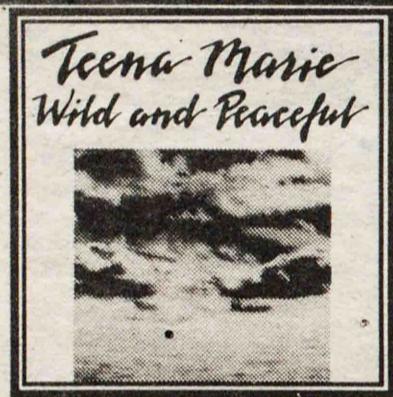
I was in love with Deborah eight years ago, and I'm no longer sure what it was I needed to be forgiven about. I do know that I'm 33 this year, which is as far as Jesus made it. This is the year, I tell myself, when I hang it up about Western guilt.

Rebirth is currently a fashionable notion, so my timing feels right. According to *Rolling Stone*, even Bob Dylan is taking Bible classes with some saved friends. I can't think of any other concept that could unite Dylan, Jimmy Carter, and Larry Flynt. My own concept of rebirth seems to be more modest than this unusual trinity's. I am not particularly interested in rededicating my life to Christ, but I am interested in returning to my sources here at home. For instance, I spend a lot of time with my mother and sister. Recently, my mother gave me a book I'd cared about as a child. I spent several hours

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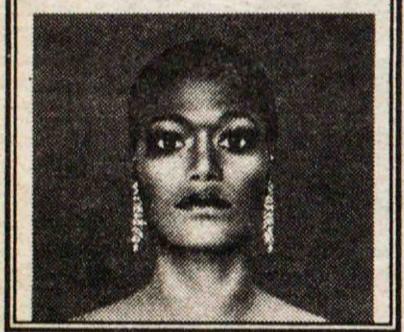


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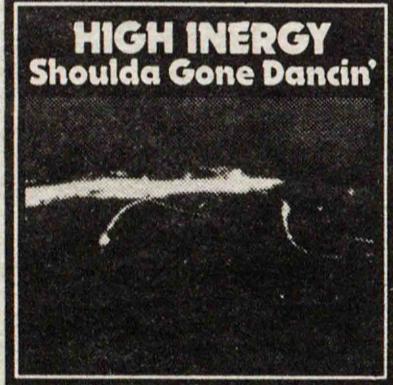


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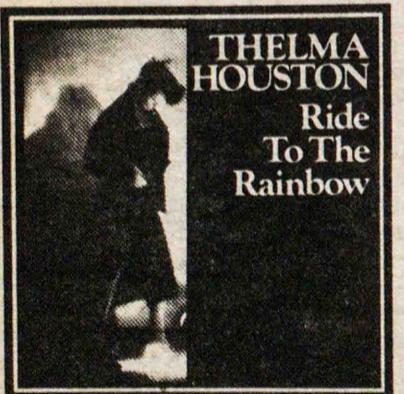
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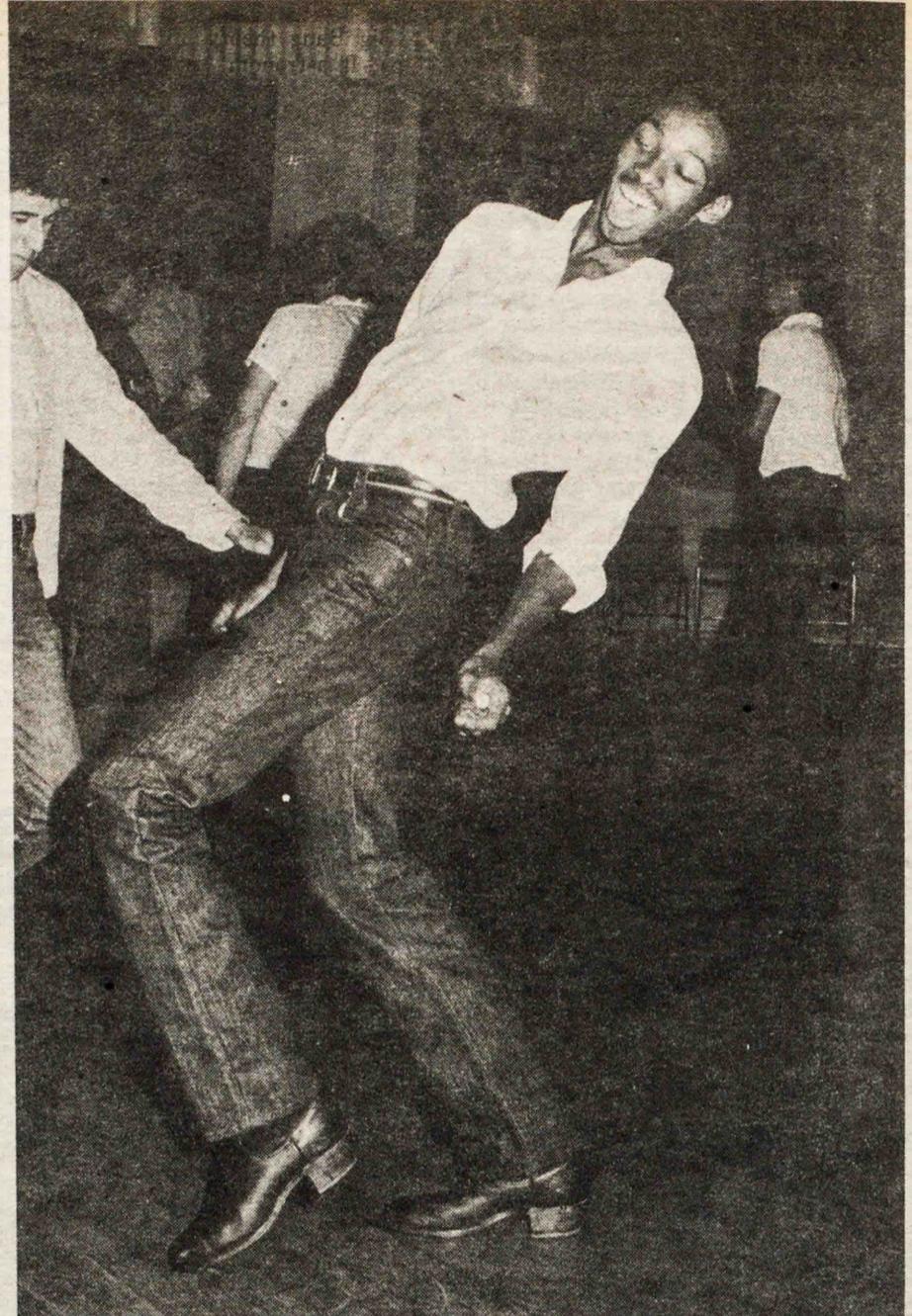


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*Dancer from the dance*

really think beyond that. But while we sat on that hillside, she took on a certain glow. Light settled around her, and she became larger than the natural view. I could see gold flecks inside her brown eyes. The freckles on her shoulders looked like gold dust that had scattered from her hair. In that moment R. became numinous for me, and I fell in love.

Looking back, I can see how it was inevitable that the magical qualities I had experienced with R. should reverse themselves. If sexual magnetism had brought us together, while we were disentangling our lives the magnets had reversed. One night I saw R. on the street with a man she briefly married. Her grin seemed to stretch from ear to ear, her jaw thrust harshly forward, and her eyes were too close together. She looked demonic.

Recently, I spoke to a woman with whom I had become friends after R. and I separated. Linda told me she'd met R. at a party. I was intensely curious. Linda hedged. "It's always odd to meet someone else's obsession." I prodded her. "She was good-looking." I prodded her again. "Okay, she seemed like a nice girl from New York to me."

I laughed sporadically for hours. R.'s magical qualities and her monstrous ones were both largely the result of projection; that is, they were qualities of vision I brought to our relationship. I have always understood this about my friends' passions, but not about my own.

Years ago, my brilliant friend David met a European model on Christopher Street. They tricked, and David fell in love. The model returned to Europe. LOVE REAL, the telegram David sent insisted. PLEASE RETURN. He did return, but promptly fell in love with someone else. "You're having a hallucination," I told David. "This love is not real." But when I consider the length of time David's attraction to this man has troubled him, I'm not so sure. David's anguish has grown skin over it; that's all.

It is dangerous to push metaphor too

far, as a story I heard about Bruno Bettelheim illustrates. According to this (probably) apocryphal tale, Bettelheim became irritated with a middle-aged woman who was knitting in the front row while he lectured. *Madam*, Bettelheim is supposed to have said, *Did you know knitting is a substitute for masturbation?* The woman did not cease. *When I knit, she replied, I knit, and when I masturbate, I masturbate.*

It is dangerous to push metaphor too far, but I do think that falling in love is the only religious experience our culture legitimizes. We cannot talk about magic, or seeing God, or believing in astrology without seeming a bit silly. Even those of us who still read the *I Ching* do so surreptitiously. But falling in love is as democratic as puberty: it happens to almost all of us if we live long enough. We can talk about falling in love as seriously as we talk about quantum physics, astronomy, Idi Amin, or nuclear power. Romantic love is the only mumbo-jumbo we all still agree about.

Before the 20th century, a lot of songs used to be about God. The chief theme of popular music is love, whether we are listening to "Gloria," hearing how Layla got somebody on his knees, or hanging out at Kingdom Hall. The Ramones insist they only want to be sedated, but Dee Dee Ramone just got married, which is at least as touching an act as taking Bible classes. In our music, the passion of Christ has been replaced by more carnal trials.

I don't know whether I'll fall in love again or not. Right now, I'm trying to be reborn. My shrink once told me that people who commit suicide by jumping out of windows or off buildings are trying for rebirth symbolically. I don't know if she was right or not, but I'm extremely suggestible. My notion of rebirth is more eccentric than I like to admit, and since I've come home, I've become a skydiver.

After 11 seconds of freefall, a skydiver reaches what is called terminal velocity. One's rate of descent increases for the first

10 or 11 seconds. Then the body's resistance to the air stabilizes the rate of falling, at about 120 miles an hour. In terms of my capacity for passion, I hope I've achieved terminal velocity. In mid-air, I feel only my own weight. Einstein once wrote, "There came to me the happiest thought of my life. . . . If one considers an observer in freefall . . . there exists for him during his fall no gravitational field—at least in his immediate vicinity." I don't think we're emotionally constructed to endure the earth moving a half-dozen times. Back when covered wagons were fashionable, I suspect people didn't fall in love repeatedly. Repetition has destroyed my sense of gravity.

Once I went with a woman to see a movie called *Marjoe*. *Marjoe* chronicled the life of a faith healer who had been trained while still a child for religious exploitation. As an adult, he cynically continued to manipulate people's religious needs. Then he let some hip filmmakers document the fraudulence behind his ministry and the sincerity of his victims. I knew at the time that I would much prefer to be one of those folks twitching ecstatically on the floor to being one of the filmmakers, or the faithhealer. This was not a moral position; the people transported by swatches of blessed bandana laid across their foreheads were having a better time.

So when I find myself meditating on the honorable history of the cliché, I think, *Oh Jesus, I bet I'm going to run this whole trip again*. Luckily, Christ is locked firmly into my numinosity slot. It is the past that glows for me now, in a light I can't quite interpret.

Last week, my mother gave me a photograph of her, taken when she was 16. This photograph made me cry. I cried because my mother was once 16 years old, and her mouth was tenderly painted on, and she had signed this repossession gift

to a boyfriend, "With all my love, Elaine." Passion. I interpret passion according to the Big Bang theory of human relationships: If astronomy is metaphorical, we are all traveling away from each other at tremendous speeds. ■

*Blanche Boyd's last novel was Mourning the Death of Magic.*

## The Closet Syndrome Gays in Hollywood

By Vito Russo

In January 1969, *Variety* screeched: HOMO N' LESBO FILMS AT PEAK—DEVIATE THEME NOW BOX OFFICE. It was the year of *The Boys in the Band*, the culmination of a decade in which Hollywood seized upon homosexuality as a seamier side of the American dream. In one year, 1968, there were more films dealing with homosexuality than in the three decades since the coming of sound. Lesbians and gay men in the movies were pathological, predatory, and dangerous; we were villains and fools, but never heroes. It was side-show time.

In *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, Rosella Falk played a cobra-eyed, dope-addicted dyke with the hots for Kim Novak. In *Petulia*, Richard Chamberlain was the wife-beater with a lech for young boys. Rod Steiger blew his brains out after kissing John Philip Law in *The Sergeant*. Sandy Dennis died when a tree fell between her legs in *The Fox*. Homosexuals were prime suspects in *The Boston Strangler*, rapists in *Riot*, and hairdressers

or queens in *No Way To Treat a Lady* and *Valley of the Dolls*. Fear, hiding, and self-destruction—the closet syndrome—were implicit in all these films. Homosexuality was the dirty secret in the last reel.

The mechanism of the closet is exposed in Robert Aldrich's *The Killing of Sister George* in which the alternative to invisibility is assimilation. Beryl Reid's George is "killed" by the safely closeted BBC exec Coral Browne, who uses sex as power to take away her lover and her career. The crime of fat, drunken, tweedy old George is not that she's a lesbian, but that she's so repugnantly butch. She is ruined for not "passing." The ethic of the closet is also advanced in *The Boys in the Band*, which coincided neatly with the birth of the activist gay movement in America. "If we could just not hate ourselves so much." Mart Crowley's passion play was a catharsis. The '60s had pried open the closet door.

Ten years later, the gay audience has been courted by almost every medium, even when it has not been openly acknowledged. Plays, books, magazines, and even television shows have presented a steady stream of real and fictional gay situations. But at the movies, very little has changed. During the '70s, gays died violent deaths in *Diamonds Are Forever*, *The Day of the Jackal*, *Freebie and the Bean*, *The Eiger Sanction*, *Swashbuckler* and even Truffaut's *Day for Night*. We were psychotic killers and tearoom cruisers in *The Laughing Policeman* and *Busting*. Fags and dykes were evil white slavers in *Drum* and *Mandingo*, gang leaders and dope pushers in *Cleopatra Jones*. We were "cured" in *M\*A\*S\*H* and *Tell Me That You Love Me Junie Moon*, and committed suicide in *Ode to Billy Joe*, *Play It As It Lays* and *The Betsy*. Another decade of villains and fools. But still no heroes.

American screen heroes have changed very little since 1945 when Billy Wilder directed Charles Jackson's *The Lost Weekend* for Paramount. In Jackson's

novel the hero's alcoholism is the result of a father fixation aggravated by a false accusation of homosexuality. Onscreen, he is driven to drink by writer's cramp. The film's producer best articulated the reason for this change. "If the drunk isn't an extremely attractive fellow, who apart from being a drunk could be a hell of a nice guy, the audiences won't go for it." The hero can't be queer.

In 1961 Dwight Macdonald reported in *Esquire* that screenwriter George Axelrod had "straightened out" the Truman Capote character in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* for George Peppard. In 1965, references to the unorthodox sexuality of Clyde Barrow were trimmed from the original script for *Bonnie and Clyde*. Warren Beatty could play an impotent killer, but not a queer. In 1975, Billy Joe McAllister took his secret to a watery grave in *Ode to Billy Joe*. "He's on his way to becoming a legend around here," says his girlfriend. "Can't have people thinking he killed himself because of a man." When Alan Parker directed Billy Hayes's *Midnight Express* in 1979, it happened again. The consummation of a homosexual affair which Hayes describes in his book is halted in the film by a gentle but manly rejection. "I made that decision," says Parker, "because I couldn't afford to have my audience think my hero was a homosexual."

Gay fiction is big business, but not one homosexual hero has reached the screen. Film projects based on the life story of tennis star Bill Tilden and James Kirkwood's *Good Times/Bad Times* were repeatedly announced in the trade press, but never materialized. According to Andrew Sarris, the Tilden project was dropped because of "nervousness about its unsavory nature." Producers Ira Yerkes and Arnie Reisman told the *Los Angeles Times* in April 1978 that "Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* will be made into a film even if we have to go kicking and screaming into the next decade."

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### Meryl C. Friedman

HOME: Brooklyn, New York

PROFESSION: Teacher and gay activist

MOST RECENT ACHIEVEMENT: Successfully lobbied to get New York State and New York City teachers' unions to pass gay rights resolutions.

PROFILE: Dynamic and responsive both as a junior high teacher and a gay rights speaker, her wit and warmth encourage gays and non-gays alike to free up their thinking on issues that relate to lesbians and gay men.

QUOTE: "If all the gays in this country would come out, there would be nothing left to be afraid of. It is only our fear that keeps us oppressed."

MEMBER: The National Gay Task Force

REASON: "Because the gay movement had already begun, my coming out was made easier and much more joyous than it might have been. With the help of organizations like NGTF, 'gay liberation' is exactly that: gay people free to be who and what they are."

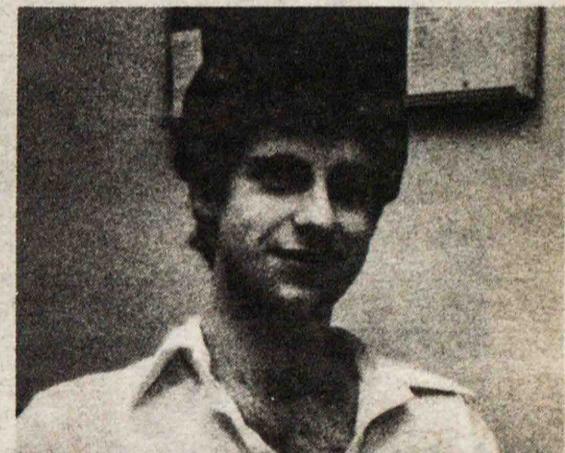


Photo: Maggie Walker

### Dan Jones

HOME: East Lansing, Michigan

PROFESSION: Student: Landscape Horticulture

MOST RECENT ACHIEVEMENT: Elected President of the Student Government at Michigan State University.

PROFILE: Dan became involved in MSU's Gay Council one week after he started college. He was Panel Coordinator his second year and was Director his junior year until the recent election.

QUOTE: "Gay women and men need to work in unison for change. We need to have gay people fit into their movement niche without pressure to be more public. Some 'closet' gays can work as effectively internally as others who are out front."

MEMBER: National Gay Task Force

REASON: "This country needs a nationally coordinated effort to implement and monitor all actions of concern to gay people. NGTF provides this program and needs everyone's support to make it work."

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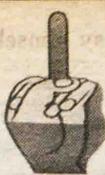
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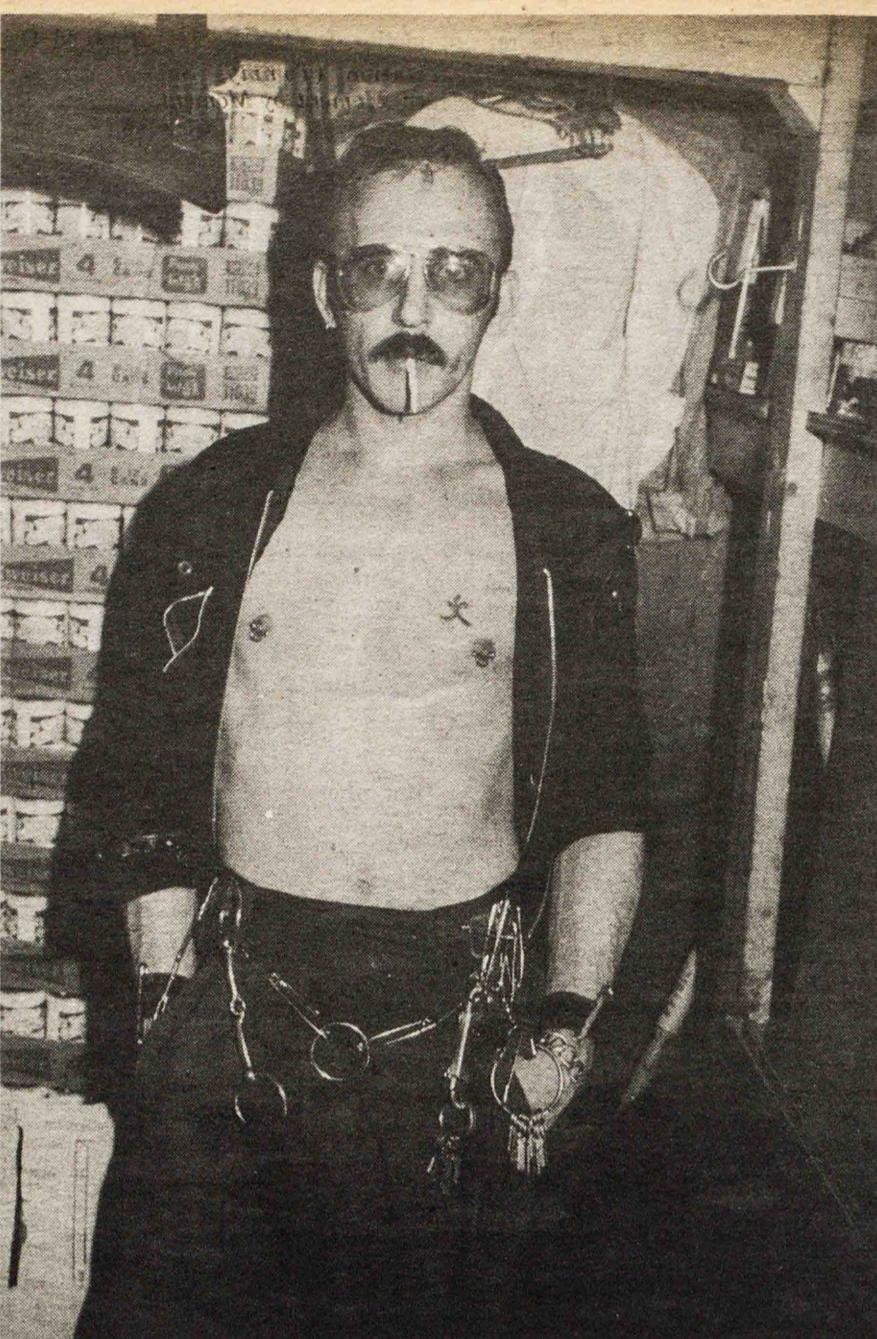
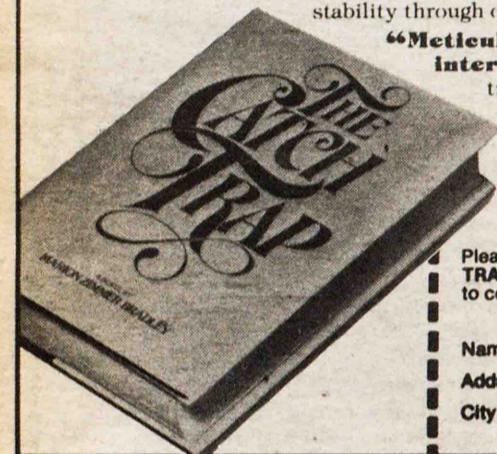
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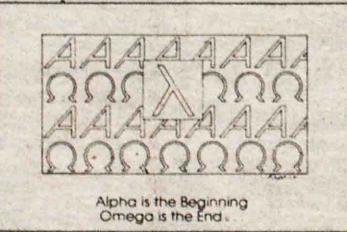
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AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME.

Lip

ade with it." Their option recently expired and there are no new offers. Ray Agayhan tried for three years to get a film version of Laura Z. Hobson's *Consenting Adult* off the ground. The story of a mother who must come to terms with her son's homosexuality "was turned down by all the major studios with enormous promptness," according to the author. Hobson could sell Jews to Hollywood in 1947 when she wrote *Gentleman's Agreement*, but she couldn't sell them gays in 1979. "They're scared to death of this one," she says. Now the story has been optioned for the New York stage.The most celebrated failure to produce a film from gay fiction involves Patricia Nell Warren's bestseller, *The Front Runner*. Originally optioned by Paul Newman, it was finally dropped when problems arose in obtaining an acceptable screenplay. "I'm not ready for a cop-out," said Newman in a *Blueboy* interview. "I won't tolerate this project being turned into a watered-down love story or substituting a female for Billy, as has been suggested by people who should know better."All proposed versions of *The Front Runner* have included sex between the Olympic runner and his coach, which is the reason it's been so difficult to cast. "I was willing to do it," said Richard Thomas, approached to play opposite Newman, "but a lot of key people are afraid." Most actors are as reluctant as ever to play homosexuals for fear that the audience will confuse them with their roles. When Perry King was about to accept the role of a gay man in *A Different Story*, he was warned by his friend Sylvester Stallone, "Don't play no faggots." Michael Winner's *The Mechanic* was originally a story about the love between two professional killers, but Charles Bronson and Jan Michael Vincent agreed to do it only after explicit sex scenes had been deleted from the script.

To do otherwise might have doomed the film. John Schlesinger had the effron-

try to show Peter Finch and Murray Head kissing on the lips in *Sunday Bloody Sunday* and people stayed away in droves. Al Pacino carried *Dog Day Afternoon*, but Sidney Lumet was careful to wait until halfway through the film before letting his audience know the bank robber's sexuality. And in most local theatres the reaction was a chorus of catcalls and boos. As Pacino says in the film, when John Cazale complains that the TV is calling him a homosexual, "It doesn't matter, Sal. It's only a freak show to them."What has changed is the heterosexual hero. "Men never used to be able to have emotional lives on film; now they do," says Ron Gold, media adviser for the National Gay Task Force. "Look at *Coming Home*, *The Deerhunter*, and even *Saturday Night Fever*. As we move into a redefinition of roles in the movies, gayness will become more acceptable."Yet, the fact that heterosexuals are more vulnerable on the screen has produced a hesitancy about homosexuality. There is a defensiveness in the way audiences cheer all the violence in *Midnight Express* and yell "Gross!" and "Disgusting!" when the gay scene comes on. A musical number like "White Boys" can serve as delightful burlesque in a film like *Hair*, but when Woof is asked if he's homosexual, the answer is a resounding no. He wouldn't throw Mick Jagger out of bed, but he's not queer. John Travolta can dance up a storm in *Saturday Night Fever*, and even be the kind of hero who refuses to taunt a local faggot on the street. But in *Moment by Moment* he goes too far. His "passive" role drew critical wrath clearly aimed at the abdication of his masculinity. David Denby termed him "Jane Russell with a hairy chest—a bimbo." Stewart Klein chided director Jane Wagner for "knowing nothing about heterosexual relations." More recently, Klein attacked the French film, *La Cage Aux Folles*, by implying that only a gay critic could find its role reversal jokes funny.

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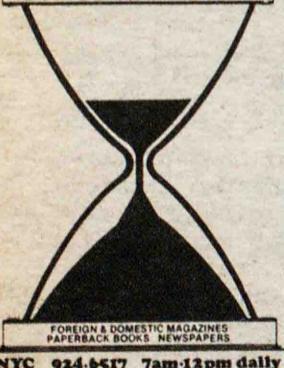
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of Nijinsky before Ken Russell gets hold of it. Arthur Laurents is set to direct his own screenplay of a film called *After Love*, which examines the breakup of a heterosexual marriage. "The wife in the film has a brother who is gay and who has been with his lover for longer than she's been married. It makes a statement about gay relationships."

Dozens of film people were eager to talk off the record about gay actors who have won Oscars, gay pop stars who cruise Santa Monica Boulevard, performers who use their academy awards as dildos, and other fascinating ephemera. But when I ask about openly gay people in tinseltown who might risk getting involved in the production of films which explore gay life, there is silence.

One young Hollywood producer wouldn't even give me the names of people to interview at his production company. "It's not time yet," he said. "But it's bound to happen soon. Someone will make the one blockbuster that proves you can make a million dollars on this market and then everyone will get into the act. It's just a matter of time."

### Some of My Best Friends Make Movies

Throughout the '70s, lesbians and gay men with little money and no power in the film business have persistently attempted to capture their own truth about the gay experience on film. In 1971, Melvin Nelson's *Some of My Best Friends Are...* was the *Grand Hotel* of ghetto drama. Boasting cameo performances by Peg Murray, Rue McLanahan, Carleton Carpenter, Gary Sandy, and Fannie Flagg, and a tour de force by the late Candy Darling, the film gained a cult following, but has been buried by American International Pictures.

Slices of gay life outside the U.S. have fared better in recent years. Richard Benner's *Outrageous!* was made in Canada for \$160,000, financed largely by the Canadian Film Development Corporation, a government agency. Money doesn't come as easily to gay directors in America. Peter Adair and five other filmmakers spent four

years trying to raise the money to complete *Word Is Out*. Finally, WNET put up \$50,000 for the chance to air it on Channel 13 soon after its release. Ron Peck and Paul Hallam spent five years in London trying to finance what *Variety* called "a gay version of *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*." Their film, *Nighthawk*, is about a gay teacher who is caught up in the bar syndrome; it follows his nightly cruising ritual with uncanny perception. The climax is a classroom sequence during which his young students suddenly ask if it's true that he's queer. *Nighthawk* was well-received in Europe and was screened this year at Cannes, but it hasn't found a U.S. distributor.

In 1969, Paramount shelved a film called *As Pretty Does*, the story of a hustler who moves in with a drag queen. The two fall in love, but the hustler, under pressure from his straight friends, finally beats up his lover and leaves. The drag queen sings a torch song. Paramount may have missed the boat on that one. Ten years later, Harvey Fierstein's autobiographical *International Stud* covered similar ground on the stage and became an enormous hit.

Andre Brassard's *Once Upon a Time in the East*, a compelling film about gay life in the East End of Montreal, has never had a commercial run in America. Christopher Larkin's *A Very Natural Thing* met with such advertising and distribution problems that its director was cowed into silence and disillusionment. "It just isn't worth it," he told the *L.A. Times* last year. "The only way to do it is if you're risking someone else's money and then you have to find some pretty naive people or some awfully good friends."

Yet, with a little help from their friends, gay filmmakers in the last few years have produced scores of movies on all aspects of gay life: Jan Oxenborg's *A Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts*, Michael McNeill's *I Love His Legs*, and Harvey Mark's *I'm Not from Here*. *TRUXX* documents a recent police raid on a Montreal gay bar and *Paul/David: High School* is a film about two teenage lovers. Tomas Gaspar has even parodied a series of Olay commercials, using gay men as ethnic models from all over the world.

of Olay commercials, using gay men as ethnic models from all over the world.

There may never be a Hollywood market for this kind of exploration on film. Gays who are seeking a radical celluloid vision of their lifestyle must look to independents. The *Grease* audience may not be interested, but if we continue to look to Hollywood for a validation of ourselves we'll all be swallowed up like poor old Sister George, whose only crime was her refusal to be a fake.

*Vito Russo is completing a book on lesbians and gay men in American film, entitled The Celluloid Closet, to be published soon by Harper & Row.*

first gay-rights bill, Intro 475. In its issue summing up the events of 1971, *Life* magazine devoted 11 pages to "Homosexuals in Revolt," four times the amount of space given to any event or personality that year.

Gay Liberation has grown at an unprecedented rate in the years following the Stonewall riot. At that time there were only three gay groups—the Mattachine Society, the Daughters of Bilitis, and the West Side Discussion Group. They used pseudonyms to identify themselves—even they were in the closet. Today over 100 gay organizations operate in New York City alone, and that doesn't include student groups and professional associations.

Closets opened everywhere. Politicians were lobbied, though the movement had few friends at City Hall or in the press. The City Council member representing Greenwich Village refused to accept petitions on behalf of gay rights. Others, such as Congresswoman Bella Abzug, rallied with us when the *Daily News* ran a bigoted editorial attacking "fags and lezzies." In 1972, Mayor John Lindsay issued an executive order barring discrimination in employment by city agencies.

No longer could we live in fear and loathing; "gay is proud" became the battle cry. As a direct result of the loss of a gay-rights referendum in Dade County, the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights was formed in 1977. Over 57 groups are on its letterhead today. Many gay people who were uncomfortable with the rhetoric of gay movement groups joined professional and social organizations: Gay Teachers, Gay City Workers, Gay Doctors, Lambda Legal Defense. Gay religious groups emerged, as did gay clubs at all of New York's colleges and universities. Every City Council member from Manhattan co-sponsored our human-rights legislation. Gay men and lesbians became visible on the streets, in the communities, and at City Hall.

"Ten years ago we had to demonstrate and pound on the doors of city officials; today at least we can sit down and talk with everyone from city agencies to the White House," says Jean O'Leary, co-

## Lambda Rising

### Gays in Politics

By Richard Brandys

On June 27, 1969, the police raided an after-hours gay bar on Christopher Street. The patrons of the Stonewall Inn, normally frightened and docile, reacted in anger, literally barricading the police inside until reinforcements arrived. For three successive nights scores of people took to the streets protesting what was at the time a normal practice: raiding our bars and harassing and thrashing the patrons. Gay Power was born.

Within a month, the Gay Liberation Front was organized, and six months after that the Gay Activist Alliance was formed. On the anniversary of the riot, 5000 to 15,000 men and women marched in the Christopher Street Parade. The second anniversary saw crowds that doubled in size. The GAA opened a renovated firehouse as a gay center. Hundreds appeared at City Hall to spur passage of the city's

executive director of the National Gay Task Force. Politicians court our votes, hire openly gay people on their staffs, and compete for the endorsement of Manhattan's Gay and Lesbian Independent Democrats. Gay people in government proudly announce their homosexuality, not only to their employers but to the straight press and the world. We run for political office, and sometimes, we win. In 1976, Jean O'Leary was elected a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, finishing fourth on a slate of well-known politicians. In 1977, Ken Sherrill on Manhattan's Upper West Side, independently of the political machine, captured the Democratic district leadership in the 69th Assembly District. Things have opened up since 1973, when Jim Owles, first president of the GAA, challenged Carol Greitzer as the first openly gay candidate for public office and received only 17 per cent of the vote.

In Brooklyn, Gary Deane, an aide to Carol Bellamy, was defeated for a seat on the City Council. Virginia Appuzzo, a community activist and a national leader of the gay movement, came in third in her bid to unseat an incumbent assemblyman. Change is slow on the political front. But William Thom, a founder of Lambda Legal Defense, was recently chosen by a Democratic Party county selection panel for a Civil Court judgeship. And open gays now serve on community boards throughout Manhattan. Community groups, such as the Chelsea Gay Association, hold regular meetings with block associations, PTAs, and the local police.

All this must be seen in the context of several defeats of a measure to guarantee equal rights in employment, housing, and accommodations, the failure of two legitimate gay newspapers, and Andrew Stein's public admission that campaigning in gay bars makes him feel "strange." Insiders say privately that close to 90 per cent of gays in government jobs have not come out of the closet. There is still the

fear of retribution under a different, less accepting administration.

For all the gains we've made in the past 10 years, I sometimes wonder whether the gay community realizes the importance of involvement. Liberation comes with active participation in the system—not from dancing. Maybe they've given us discos, back rooms, and the right to cruise (within our ghettos) to divert our attention from the oppression that remains. The movement has failed to educate the gay community. We still don't understand our enormous political and economic strength. When we do, our lives will change. ■

*Richard Brandys is an assistant to the speaker pro tempore of the New York State Assembly.*

## Lambda Under Siege

By Doug Ireland

"Hard to take," was the way San Francisco's Mayor Dianne Feinstein described the verdict in the Dan White murder trial—a verdict that could see the former cop, fireman, and supervisor back on the streets in just 32 months. It came in the same week as the execution of John Spenkelink in Florida. These events constitute a damning indictment of Americans locked out of the economic, social, and political mainstream. Most heterosexuals were surprised at the leniency of

the White verdict. Most homosexuals were not.

After all, Dan White only killed a fag supervisor and a mayor who was a friend of the fag. And fag-bashing is a national pastime, seldom punished. We homosexuals know that the Dan White verdict is but the most recent, most visible manifestation of our real position in this society. Even after years of struggle, we understand that it is still open season on us—all year round:

- Richard J. Heaken, a young gay activist, was beaten to death by four teenagers as he left an Arizona gay bar a year and a half ago. The murderers were football players on a local college team, from "good families," said the judge who presided over their trial. He released the killers saying, "They have suffered enough."

- In Houston, last year, Anthony Ramirez was leaving a gay bar when he was attacked by three policemen who later admitted to having drowned the young Latino. The cops were acquitted.

- Al Best, a fortyish man of conservative dress and demeanor, was fired last month from his job as a sales manager only three days after he announced his candidacy for San Diego's City Council as an open homosexual. Said Best: "Now I know what Rosa Parks felt like in Montgomery in 1957 when she was told to go to the back of the bus."

Thirty states of this union (including New York) still have laws on the books making illegal any physical expression of the love women feel for women and men feel for men—as the Pennsylvania legislature reminded us earlier this month when it approved (189 to 14) a resolution attacking Governor Dick Thornburgh's proclamation of "Gay Pride Week" for "officially setting aside a week in honor of persons who violate the criminal laws... (since) deviate sexual intercourse has always been a serious crime."

There are thousands of homosexual

political prisoners in America, but it is difficult to give a precise number because of the wide variety of legal oppressions used to harass us. As Jean O'Leary of the National Gay Task Force recently told the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, "Consensual sodomy statutes are almost always enforced exclusively against homosexuals, unless the heterosexual situations involve prostitution. In 'lovers' lane' situations, heterosexual couples are told to button up and move on, while gay people are arrested for public indecency or sodomy. Two women have been charged with sodomy for sharing a sleeping bag in Michigan, and two men for kissing in a parked car in California. Two women have been arrested for dancing together in Massachusetts, and two men for holding hands in New York."

Vague statutes against loitering, disorderly conduct, and solicitation are employed in most communities entirely against homosexuals. Homosexual men are arrested for "touching in a rude and insolent manner" in Indiana; for "indecent, often wanton, and lascivious acts" in Colorado; for "being a lewd person in speech and behavior" in Massachusetts; and in a number of states for "assault and battery" for simply touching a police officer. "Protective custody" is used in Boston to round up gay men and keep them in jail overnight. In Chicago, a gay man was recently arrested at police headquarters when he tried to complain that an investigating officer had refused to file a report after he was assaulted and robbed.

In most of America, police entrapment of homosexuals is still the rule, not the exception. Almost every homosexual has a horror story to tell. Last year in Delaware, for example, a young school teacher in a small town noticed that a car was driving slowly alongside him. The driver beckoned and, when the teacher came closer, propositioned him. The young man said no, he'd had a hard day. The car

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followed as he headed toward his house. The driver said he was lonely and asked to be invited in, but the teacher said he didn't take up with strangers. He suggested staying where they were. After a half-hour of conversation, the man in the car asked once again and this time the teacher agreed. Just as he unlocked the door, he was arrested for "solicitation." Fearful for his job, he agreed to sentencing prior to trial and got off with the promised probation. He didn't know that the police had called his principal with news that there was a fag on the staff. Compelled to resign, ineligible for unemployment benefits, his career in ruins, the teacher is now forced to exist on odd jobs.

Ever since Anita Bryant initiated repeal of a Dade County law extending civil rights ordinances to homosexuals, there has been a stepped-up assault on the gains hard-won by gays. It took a million-dollar fund-raising effort to defeat California's Briggs Initiative, the infamous Proposition 6 that would have started a witchhunt in the schools against homosexuals and straight supporters of their rights. Another referendum, Initiative 13, was organized by two policemen in Seattle in an attempt to repeal that city's gay-rights legislation. Despite the fact that a major fund-raising benefit in the gay community was raided by 20 cops, the initiative was defeated. But similar efforts led by political demagogues and right-wing religious fanatics

have succeeded in repealing anti-discrimination laws in St. Paul, Topeka, and Eugene, Oregon. Homosexuals in another half-dozen cities are organizing to defend similar statutes against repeal.

Although we are under attack by the right wing, we have found few friends in the liberal community. The blood was hardly dry on the paths of Central Park's Ramble after the beatings of six men last summer by a gang of anti-gay toughs before Murray Kempton, the liberal conscience, rushed into print with a vicious column attacking Mayor Koch for proclaiming Gay Pride Week. Urging homosexuals to stay in their closets, Kempton compared this to "the delicacy displayed by our Hispanic brothers and sisters when they concealed their beer cans in brown paper bags." Nicholas Von Hoffman, who won the admiration of the '60s generation for his advocacy journalism, has consistently used his column to oppose civil rights for gays, attacking "professional pansies and their purple prose."

Even *The Village Voice*, until recently, has been a vehicle for the liberal homophobes. Not content with constant catty anti-homosexualisms, the *Voice* last year front-paged the young fogey Jeff Greenfield's attack on the fight for homosexual freedom in a tortured explication of "Why Gay Rights Is Different from All Other Rights." Adam Walinsky, who with Greenfield helped to write Robert

Kennedy's most moving speeches in defense of civil rights for blacks, has become a leading theoretician of the anti-gay intelligentsia, whose house organ is Lewis Lapham's *Harper's* magazine. The list of liberal intellectuals and political leaders who have lent themselves to the anti-gay backlash is endless.

But the greatest crime is the crime of silence. Even Amnesty International, prestigious defender of the powerless and oppressed, refused at its annual convocation last fall to adopt a proposal by Amnesty's Dutch branch that would have included "sexual preference" in its definition of human rights.

We must be prepared for the backlash that inevitably follows when unpopular minorities demand their rights. In Chicago, under its first woman mayor, Jane Byrne, police last month conducted a week-long series of raids on gay bars that resulted in the arrest or injury of dozens. Police in Milwaukee recently arrested 30 men in raids on private-membership bath houses; while in New Orleans, seven men were arrested in a bath house and charged with "attempted crimes against nature" after they allegedly offered to have sex with an undercover cop who pretended to be seeking it. Street violence against gays is on the increase across the country, and the Dan White verdict is sure to encourage it. Who can forget that just after the events in Dade County, a gang of youths

in San Francisco stabbed a young homosexual to death while shouting, "This one for Anita!"

Too many homosexuals limit their support of the liberation movement to cocktail-hour chatter. We should support groups that carry on the fight in the courts to enlarge the recognition of our right to love, like the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Lesbian Mother Custody Center; service groups like the Harvey Milk United Fund; and magazines like *Christopher Street* that expand our cultural and political consciousness. Neighborhood-organization provides us with the means to turn a ghetto into a community; for example, activists are moving to incorporate West Hollywood as a city, paving the way for the election of a government sympathetic to and including homosexuals. In a period of backlash, nonviolent civil disobedience makes a witness that speaks truth to power, and presents the silent gay majority with the necessity of moral choice; the attacks upon us should strengthen our militance.

The message for us is really quite simple: As the pioneer German homosexual leader Dr. Kurt Hiller said nearly 60 years ago, "The liberation of homosexuals can only be the work of the homosexuals themselves."

*Doug Ireland, a former Soho Weekly News columnist and New York Post reporter, is currently at work on a novel.*

# Bob Livingston (1932-1979)

By Arthur Bell

Robert Lewis Livingston, age 47, son of fashion designer Mollie Parnis, member of New York City's Commission on Human Rights, special assistant to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, producer of Broadway and TV shows, onetime publisher of *MORE*, gay activist, gentleman, raconteur, beautiful man, and dear friend, died May 27.

Bob knew he didn't have long to live, but he didn't realize death was so close. Last August, he was vacationing on Fire Island and noticed a loss of weight, coupled with heavy coughing. He was operated on at Sloan-Kettering to remove a tumor. Cancer was discovered in his lungs. It spread to his neck, his legs, his back. In November, he told me, "My doctor says I have another eight years. Eight years is a long time to accomplish what I want."

One of the things Bob Livingston wanted most was civil rights for gay women and men. That he was rich, privileged, and worked within the system made it both easy and difficult. Naturally, his entree to City Hall was frowned on by radicals. Naturally, his high standing in the New York social scene was also scorned by them. But even those furthest to the left knew that Bob's intentions were sincere. His activism was no ego trip, and, in many respects, Bob was more radical than the radicals. His position made him extremely vulnerable: he had plenty to lose. But he loved being open, savored being out of the closet. It was a wonderful fact of the last years of his life.

In June 1977, he organized the New York Political Action Council (NYPAC), a group whose goal was to educate politicians; those doing the educating were professional women and men who were gay, such as writers, educators, doctors, and lawyers. On July 13, 1977, Bob invited Ed Koch to speak with the NYPAC members at his apartment. That night, the lights went out all over town. Just before they did, Koch promised that, if elected, he'd issue an executive order banning discrimination in city government on the basis of sexual orientation. Three weeks after taking office, Koch made good his promise.

I last saw Bob Livingston on May 5. We had dinner together at his apartment. He was frail, but his face was animated, his mind active. He knew I was working on this special supplement and suggested that I bring along a tape recorder. "We'll schmooze," he said. Schmooze was one of Bob's favorite words.

He recounted the story of how he got

involved in gay liberation. In September 1973, he had read in *The New York Times* about Howard Brown, former city health commissioner, coming out of the closet. "I had never heard of Howard. I didn't know him, but I had never seen an upbeat article like that before: It ran on the front page. About two weeks later, there was a picture in the *Times* of Dr. Brown, along with several other people including Marty Duberman, who was a friend. They were part of a new organization called the National Gay Task Force. I phoned Marty, and I said, 'I don't know anything about gay rights, but I know I've been walking on the backs of kids too long. They're out there yelling for my rights. I'm not a very good demonstrator. Would it help if I gave you some money?' Marty said it certainly would. I sent them a check.

"A few days later, the phone rang. It was Howard Brown. He said that the check was the largest ever given in America to a gay organization. I got furious. It was only \$1000 and I knew lots of people who could afford to give that amount or more. So I got involved."

Involvement meant holding a "radical chic" fund-raiser for the Task Force at his apartment (David Susskind, Charlotte Curtis, Arlene Francis, and Laura Z. Hobson were among the guests), educating himself in the area of gay rights and talking about the need for a civil rights bill to anyone who'd listen.

"Soon I became convinced that the way to make progress was to have somebody inside the administration. All the screaming, all the demonstrating, meant nothing if there was no one inside the Hall.

"I made an effort through Percy Sutton and Eleanor Holmes Norton to get on the Human Rights Commission. They both helped. But in a face-to-face meeting, Mayor Beame turned me down.

"A couple of years after that, I got a letter on gold stationery which said that the mayor was delighted to appoint me as a member of his committee on Alcoholism and Mental Health. I didn't know anything about alcoholism and I had asked for something totally different."

Nevertheless, Bob worked quietly on the commission for two years. Then he went back to the mayor, using "other pressure."

The other pressure Bob Livingston used was Senator Jacob Javits. According to Bob, Beame probably thought, "Here is this nice Jewish boy who wants that commissionership so badly, he'll do anything for it, so I'll make him happy. It'll

make all these other people happy, too." In March 1977, Bob was selected as one of the eight members of the Human Rights Commission.

"The mayor could have buried the announcement along with the other appointments, but instead he sent out a press release. It was headlined, 'First Gay Ever To Be Appointed in City Government.' I was delighted. It gave us a platform. It gave the press someone to call if they needed credentials. Unlike some of the people who had been at City Hall before, I wanted them to know I was gay. The whole point of the exercise was that there was a gay person in city government."

Now, Bob claimed, gay people had a jumping-off point. We were able to ask for stuff we needed. For instance, a gay men's health clinic funded by the city, and a center or social club for older gays. "There are a lot of things the community should be asking the city for as taxpayers, and should be getting. They will, but it will take time." As for the gay-rights bill, Bob had come to believe it would never pass in Manhattan as long as we have a city council. What would it take to politicize gays?

"Anger," he replied quickly and sharply. "I know how to get us angry enough to do it. Close down the back rooms. If the city did that, we'd be furious. It would be the first time in years that gays in New York would be angry enough to act. The way to arouse is by harassment. This is what happened with the Stonewall. If you tell a politician, 'You're denying me my constitutional rights,' he doesn't give a shit."

"After a meeting at City Hall last year, I heard one of our radical friends say, 'I'm now issuing a call to the gay community for massive physical demonstrations outside City Hall.' I said to him, 'If it's going to be massive, you better make it massive. Not the same 500 who massive themselves every time we have a demonstration.' It doesn't work anymore. The City Council people walk up and down the steps and say, 'Hi Allen, hi Morty, oh there's Roller-Arena. Hi Roller. How are ya?' It's ridiculous."

"In seven years, I have never been able to discover a way to organize people in New York into a 'gay community.' Anyone who says he does is a liar. NYPAC is not the answer. GAA isn't. Most people aren't interested in being a gay community. The fact that there are two gay bars called Uncle Charley's in town does not a community make."

"I used to say when I spoke at schools and organizations, that the day black people discovered their power was when they moved from the back to the front of the bus. They could close the bus companies down. And they had that power all the time."

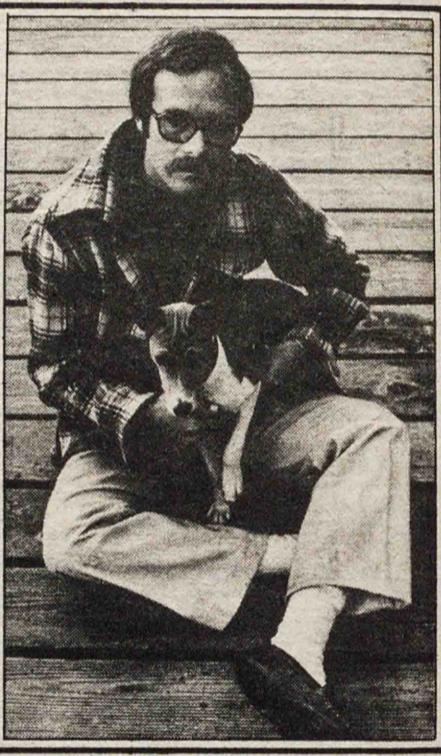
What should gays do? Picket Bloomingdale's? Livingston laughed. "Not bad for a start. Rather irrational, though. I'd rather pick something that discriminates openly against gay people."

"Radicals and the early movement people failed because they eventually came to demonstrate in a spirit of trumped-up wrath, which was exclusionary of more people than it intended to exclude. They were far more anxious to keep certain homosexuals out of what they were doing, than to hurt heterosexual bigots. They made it as uncomfortable as humanly possible for anyone earning more than \$7000 a year to become part of what they were doing. They didn't want me. Elitist, terrible person, is what they called people like me."

"If I were feeling well, I think I might make a big change in my life. I'd study more about various gay urban situations. I only know about Manhattan, nowhere else. But I'm tired of talking about politics now, so turn that recorder off, and let's just schmooze."

We schmoozed a little more. He got tired, and I left.

Three weeks later, Bob died. A memorial program will be held this evening, June 20, at 7:30, at the Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Square South, New York.



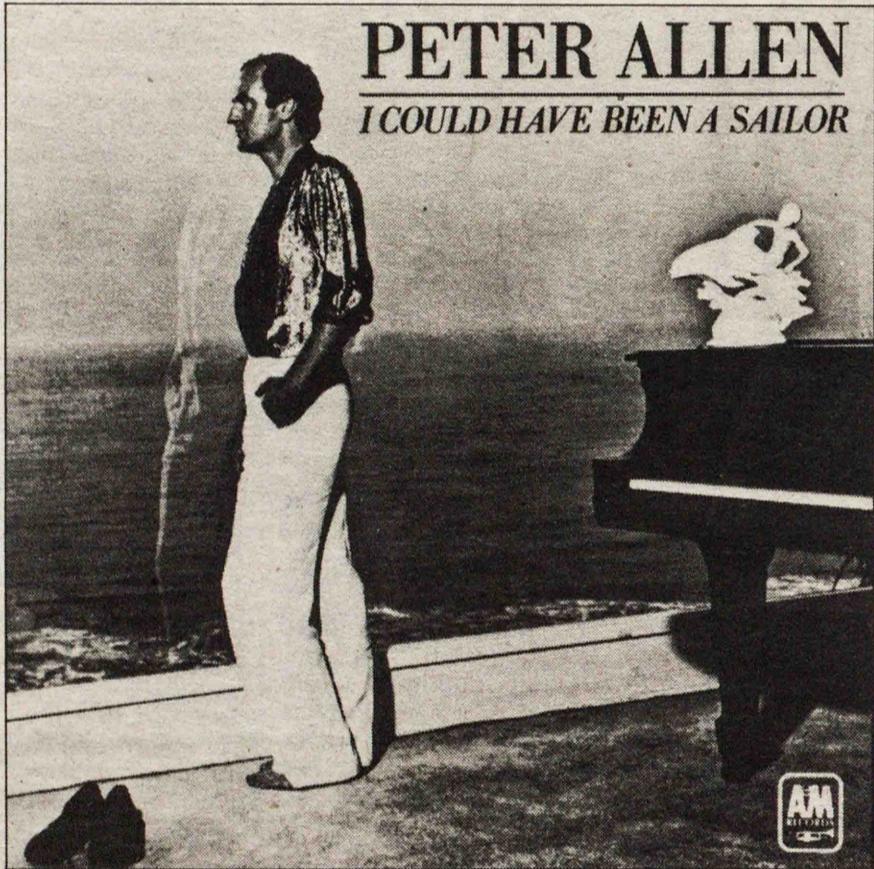
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